

DIRECTOR COMMENTARIES

COCAINE BEAR **KNOCK AT THE CABIN** MAGIC MIKE 3

TOTAL

M. Night Shyamalan
Steven Soderbergh
Elizabeth Banks

THE
WORLD'S
MOST TRUSTED
FILM
REVIEWS

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

25
GREATEST
DETECTIVES
EVER!

**DUNGEONS
& DRAGONS**
World-ending
stakes and live
volcanoes

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

LUTHER

THE FALLEN SUN

PLUS

HUGH
JACKMAN

JENNY SLATE

KUMAIL
NANJIANI

SCARLETT
JOHANSSON

JESSE
EISENBERG

**IDRIS ELBA'S CONFLICTED
COP GOES BIG**

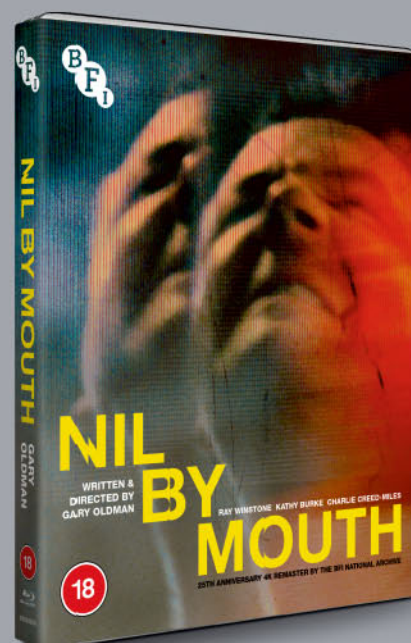
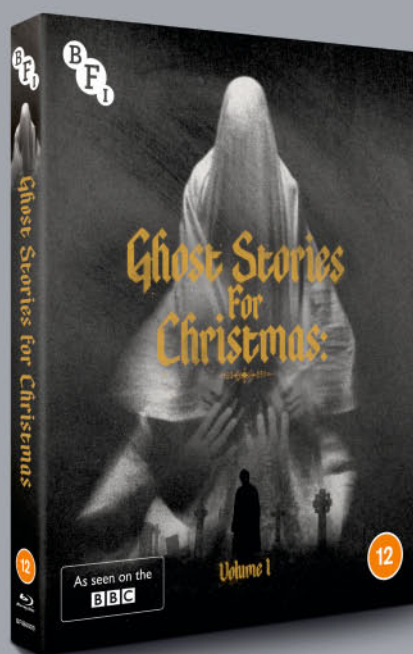
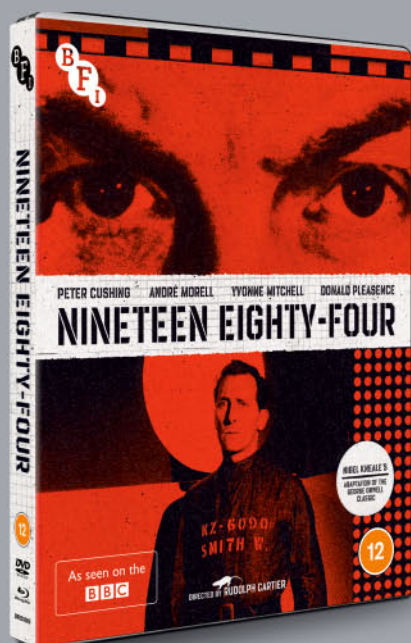
"MY AMBITION FOR THIS
IS TO HAVE BOND'S SCALE
AND REVERENCE"

THE FABELMANS
PUSS IN BOOTS 2
WOMEN TALKING
HOLY SPIDER

FUTURE



GIFTS FOR FILM & TV LOVERS



LIMITED EDITION BLU-RAY SETS

ORDER FROM
shop.bfi.org.uk

**BFI
SHOP**

Welcome to

TOTAL FILM THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE



Wotcha! As John Luther would say. We're thrilled to kick off the new year with something dark and dirty, the underworld stomped through by London's grumpiest and most tenacious detective as he graduates to feature-length cases. Luther himself, Idris Elba, knew I liked wigs and make-up so invited me to conduct our chat in the make-up trailer. He told me about his plans for his DCI and we have the full report here for you.

Luther is part of our countdown of the best 25 detectives on screen – see page 44 to find out where our deductions landed him. We've also probed the creatives behind *The Son*, *Holy Spider* and *Women Talking*. And we're interrogating the directors of a trio of juicy movies: Elizabeth Banks on *Cocaine Bear*, Steven Soderbergh on *Magic Mike's Last Dance* and M. Night Shyamalan on *Knock At The Cabin*.

Putting a magazine together is like cracking a case each month – we start with a blank slate and the usual suspects, then through careful analysis and chatting to the right people a story is revealed. OK, we're not chasing down bad guys, but we are taking names and asking questions. And we can't wait to get stuck into 2023...

Enjoy the issue!

JANE CROWTHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
@TOTALFILM_JANE

CALL SHEET

THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS



DEPUTY EDITOR

MATT MAYTUM
@MATTMAYTUM

The *Avatar: The Way Of Water* premiere afterparty allowed me to fulfil an ambition – to go into the Natural History Museum after hours. Where better to party than under a giant whale skeleton?



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

LEILA LATIF
@LEILA_LATIF

I joined Hayley Atwell and Daniel Kaluuya on the main jury of this year's BIFAs. When Samantha Morton said she thought "you'd forgotten me" in her lifetime achievement speech, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

JAMES MOTTRAM
@JAMESMOTTRAM

Loved interviewing Laura Dern for *The Son*. We met before *Jurassic World Dominion* inched its way over the \$1b mark. "We just got to go out, start handing out leaflets or something," she said.



EDITOR AT LARGE

JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

I phoned Jesse Eisenberg to talk love and sex – themes in his TV show, *Fleishman Is In Trouble*. At one point he went silent. Thought I'd crossed a line, but he'd just gone in the lift.



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

NEIL SMITH

Had a front row seat at *Saving Grace*, a musical spin on the cannabis comedy that inspired *Doc Martin*. Enjoyed K.T. Tunstall's songs and Craig Ferguson's villainous return to a film he co-wrote and starred in.



SENIOR ONLINE EDITOR

JACK SHEPHERD
@JACKJSHEPHERD

Kate Winslet was a delight to talk to about *Avatar: The Way Of Water* – even if I had seen the movie and she hadn't yet! Talk about early access...

Contents

#333 JANUARY 2023



THIS ISSUE

32 LUTHER: THE FALLEN SUN

Exclusive! *TF* talks to star Idris Elba about DCI John L's big move into movies.

44 25 BEST DETECTIVES OF ALL TIME

More Elba room for our cover guy... but where will he rank among his peers?

52 KNOCK AT THE CABIN

Come in, Mr. Shyamalan, tell us all about your new apocalyptic thriller.

56 COCAINE BEAR

If thinking 'Elizabeth Banks' true-story comedy' you're on the right (white) lines.

60 MAGIC MIKE'S LAST DANCE

How to bring sexy back, by Steven Soderbergh.

64 THE SON

Hugh Jackman and Laura Dern on the spiritual follow-up to *The Father*.

68 WOMEN TALKING

A superbly apt description of a feature about Sarah Polley's ensemble drama.

74 HOLY SPIDER

Timely drama based on a real-life Iranian atrocity.

EVERY ISSUE

3 EDITOR'S LETTER

Plus our latest celeb tales.

78 TOTAL FILM INTERVIEW

Kumail Nanjiani on success, superheroes and strippers.

120 DIALOGUE

Your mail: winged feet, glass onions, evil condoms.

TEASERS

7 THE FABELMANS

Scriptwriter Tony Kushner on keeping things Steven.

10 SCARLETT JOHANSSON

She's off to *Asteroid City* and *My Mother's Wedding*.

11 BROKER

Kore-eda Hirokazu's latest looks into baby boxes.

14 DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

The fantasy-board-game adaptors on finding *Honour Among Thieves*.

22 PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH

Nine reasons why the swashbuckling sequel will be the stuff of Dreamies.

29 IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Our Jamie on that time he caused a - distressingly real - stink in the *TF* office.

31 DON CHEADLE

On *White Noise* and what's next for *War Machine*.

TOTAL FILMBUFF

108 IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Never mind all the time travel, is *BTTF Pt II*'s telegram scene legit?

109 10 OF THE BEST

Guitars! More Marty McFly, plus Prince, The King and The Tap. Axe-cellent.

110 FLOP CULTURE

Why Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* adap didn't leave audiences breathless.

116 INTERMISSION

A *TF* writer pauses to consider Manic Pixie Dream Girls.



SCAN TO GET
OUR WEEKLY
NEWSLETTER



7



'IT'S NOT A
COMPETITION, BUT
I REFERENCE BOND
AS A TEMPLATE'

32

BIGGER AND BADDER
Idris Elba on the 'scaling up' of
a certain DCI John Luther

44



64



68

78



SCREEN

88 THE FABELMANS

The (fictionalised) life and times of Steven Spielberg.

90 BABYLON

Once upon an earlier time... in Hollywood.

91 ENYS MEN

Does Mark Jenkin's latest rise to the level of *Bait*?

91 THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A #@%!

Find out how many #@%!'s our reviewer gives.

93 TÁR

Cate Blanchett: the most memorable conductor this side of *On The Buses*.

94 AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER

Our verdict on the mo(i)st anticipated blockbuster of the past 12 months.

96 THE PALE BLUE EYE

Poe-riod thriller (rather than a condition you get watching too much *Avatar*).

97 ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED

Vivid docu-snapshot of photographer Nan Goldin.

99 A MAN CALLED OTTO

It's a miserable day in the neighbourhood for Tom H.

100 RE-RELEASES

From *Rashomon* to *Kong*.

101 CLASSIC TV

Heading down the dean streets of sitcom memory.

102 SOUNDTRACKS

The ultimate John Hughes playlist. Ohhh yeah.

104 GAMES PREVIEW

The big titles making our *Wild Hearts* beat faster.

106 BOOKS

Come and read with us Danny, forever and ever...

Advertisement



HOUSEHOLD BILLS MAKING YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE OUT OF OPTIONS? WE GOT YOU.

We'll show you what's worth considering, all you have to do is choose. And with only good choices, it's hard to go wrong.

From car, home and travel insurance to broadband and breakdown cover, you can compare quotes for over 40 products. We're your champions of choice, here to help you save.

Check out [go.compare](https://www.go.compare) for more info or to compare quotes.

GO.COMPARE



EDITED BY
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY



TEASERS

LIFE ON FILM

THE FABELMANS How Steven Spielberg brought his cine-memoir to the screen.

The idea of *The Fabelmans* – a semi-autobiographical cine-memoir inspired by a young Steven Spielberg’s life – has existed at least as long as his first collaboration with screenwriter Tony Kushner (*Lincoln*, *West Side Story*). On their first night of filming 2005’s *Munich*, Kushner casually asked Spielberg what had made him want to become a director. The resulting answer – a story about his formative years – felt to Kushner like the basis of a movie.

Though he suggested the idea then, they’d collaborate on three more screenplays (filming two) before working on *The Fabelmans* as co-writers, a first for their partnership. It wasn’t until September 2020 that their collaboration began in earnest.

“We got the first draft done in two months,” Kushner tells *Teasers*. “It was three days a week, four hours a day. I never work with anything like that kind of discipline. And even Steven was impressed with how fast that came together. So that was a wild difference.”

Kushner is candid about the disagreements he often has with the director on set, but the writing process was more relaxed. “Directing a movie – you’re commanding this entire city’s worth of people,” says Kushner. “So that puts us at loggerheads in a very complicated way.” The process of assembling the script really began in the spring of 2020. “I asked him all the questions that I could think of asking him about,” says Kushner. “And we sort of covered everything in his childhood. It felt overwhelming to both of us. ➡

➤ How do we extract a coherent story out of this vast amount of material?”

The distance of fiction presented a way in. “I said, ‘I think I want to take it, and have your permission to play around with it, and move things around, and also really try to figure out motivations and character arcs. I’m going to try to adhere to what you told me, but it’s going to be a work of fiction.’”

The fictional family name had already been set, as had the locations, from Spielberg’s frequently uprooted childhood. Sending updates, Kushner was relieved to find that Spielberg approved. “He said, ‘It’s really weird. It’s my life, but it’s not my life.’ Which I think is exactly the point. It gave him a certain kind of cooling objectivity that he wouldn’t have had otherwise because it’s really his story and his life. And then we boiled it down.”

Kushner also interviewed Spielberg’s sisters as part of his research, as well as a man who had worked with Spielberg’s father. The story hangs on the life of the young Spielberg substitute, Sammy Fabelman (Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord in the earliest scenes), and his family: ma Mitzi (Michelle Williams) and pa Burt (Paul Dano), and a trio of younger sisters. Spielberg’s sisters would come to set, and continued to give Kushner stories. “Some of them made their way into the movie,” he grins.

The film follows Sammy from a kid awestruck by his first cinematic experience, through to his teenage years as an aspiring filmmaker, all against the backdrop of his parents’ marriage dissolving. As a teen, Sammy’s played by Gabriel LaBelle. At the time of taping his first audition, LaBelle thought he was just reading for Untitled Amblin Film. Only after that did he get a sense of the role he was up for. “And I’m like, ‘You’re telling me this now?!’” he laughs.

On playing a sorta version of his director, LaBelle says, “Everything that happens to my character, happened to him. And so we wanted to honour the story he was trying to tell, and make sure that my character is drawing from and feeling and experiencing the same things that he did...”

‘He’s just remembering this time in his life, and the people who loved him and how he was raised’
GABRIEL LABELLE

That pivotal moment where junior Fabelman gets his very first camera.



LaBelle had access to copious amounts of footage Spielberg had shot in his younger years, including his ambitious 40-minute war movie, *Escape To Nowhere*, which is recreated in *The Fabelmans*. But that wasn’t the only meta aspect that felt like a movie within a movie. “It’s a movie about Steven’s life,” he says. “You can see moments from this story that you’re like, ‘Oh, he put this in that movie,’ or, ‘Oh, this inspired that.’ It was really cool.”

Unsurprisingly, the making of the movie was an emotional experience for Spielberg. “There were these scenes where at the end of shooting, he’d walk in, tears in his eyes, and we all did a group hug,” recalls LaBelle. “He’s just remembering this time in his life, and the people who loved him and how he was raised. It was very surreal for him, but it’s only more inspirational [to me], like, ‘OK, this is a really meaningful film to someone. You’ve got to do your part to make sure that it works.’”

For all that personal resonance though, Kushner and Spielberg were insistent that it worked as a standalone film, rather than something purely aimed at the auteur’s superfans. “I felt that turning it into a kind of fiction was important,” says Kushner. “What we said all along is, unless it moves people and means something to people who have no feeling at all about filmmaking and don’t know about you or care about you or your movies – unless it works for somebody like that, we shouldn’t do it. It can’t be one for the fanbase or one for the family or something like that. It really needs to justify its existence. And he was very much in agreement with that.”

MATT MAYTUM

THE FABELMANS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 JANUARY.



It’s all gone meta: real-life Spielberg sets up a shot with the fictional Spielberg.

Meet The Fabelmans, a typical dysfunctional middle American family.



Scouting for ideas with his mates down the local picture palace.

HOT RIGHT NOW

SCARLETT JOHANSSON IS ON THE CASE...

What goes around comes around, and that certainly seems to be case for Scarlett Johansson. Way back in 1995, the future Black Widow made one of her first film appearances as Sean Connery's daughter in crime thriller *Just Cause*. Now, 28 years, two Oscar nominations and nine MCU outings later, she is returning to the book that inspired Arne Glimcher's film for a Prime Video series that will mark her first leading TV role.

In the largely forgotten original, a 10-year-old ScarJo played an adorable moppet who at one point gets kidnapped by the vindictive Blair Underwood. This time around, she'll be playing a reporter for a Florida newspaper who starts to suspect the death-row inmate whose last days she has been sent to cover may be innocent.

Johansson is not the first big name to be lured by the streamers' deep pockets; Robert De Niro, for example, is lined up to star in Netflix's political thriller *Zero Day*. The fact she has bided her time, though, suggests she's been waiting for just the right vehicle – one she'll executive produce with Christy Hall, co-creator of Netflix's 2020 dark comedy *I Am Not Okay With This*.

There's a nostalgic element to another of Johansson's upcoming projects, a family drama that will see Kristin Scott Thomas make her directorial debut. KST, you may recall, played SJ's mother in both 1998's *The Horse Whisperer* and 2008's *The Other Boleyn Girl*. It seems all too fitting, then, that she'll be doing it again in *My Mother's Wedding*, in which Johansson and two other siblings (Sienna Miller and Emily Beecham) return to their childhood home to see their mum get hitched for a third time.

With Wes Anderson's ensemble piece *Asteroid City* in the can and Greg Berlanti's *Project Artemis* in production, it looks like Johansson is spreading her wings after a decade in Natasha Romanoff's leathers. "My acting career has moved into production and development," she told *Forbes* recently while promoting her skincare line. "I think there are no ideas that are not worth throwing on the table." **NEIL SMITH**

**ASTEROID CITY AND MY MOTHER'S WEDDING
ARE IN POST-PRODUCTION.**



DAVID SLUPER/AUGUST

Selling a baby on the black market is a tricky business.



BABY TALK

BROKER Kore-eda Hirokazu's latest gets to the heart of the baby box issue...

It all started with *Like Father, Like Son*. Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu was researching his 2013 prize-winning paternity drama when he discovered the idea of baby boxes. Put bluntly, it's for parents to anonymously leave children they feel unable to raise. While Kore-eda discovered that only one such 'donation station' existed in Japan, nearby Korea was a different matter. "Ten times as many babies are put into baby boxes there as they are in Japan. And then I thought, 'Well, this may be an idea.'"

Coming off his Paris-set film *The Truth*, Kore-eda was pleased to hit upon a story that could work in Korea. For years, he'd been talking to Korean actors Gang Dong-won and *Parasite*'s Song Kang-ho about collaborating. Suddenly, he had the perfect story, one that sees church employees Dong-soo (Gang) and Sang-hyeon (Song) secretly selling off the babies. Soon, they team up with So-young (Lee Ji-eun), a young woman intending to leave her child behind, and orphaned youngster Hae-jin, played by the mischievous Seung-soo Im. "I've never met a child who didn't do as he was told as much as this child did," grins Kore-eda.

The film, which won Song the Best Actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival last year, immediately slots right alongside the best of Kore-eda's work.

Movies such as 2018's Palme d'Or-winning *Shoplifters*, for example, which similarly focused on surrogate families. "I do hope that it starts to shine a light on – and help us to reevaluate – this idea that families can only be formed by people who are connected by blood," he says.

The bigger question is, what did he want to say about those who feel compelled to use baby boxes? "The idea of the baby box in Japan and Korea is still quite divisive," he answers. "There are people that say that baby boxes are good because they save lives. There are others who say that it encourages women to discard their children, that it's a negative presence. I wanted to show that life is a blessing and to affirm the lives of these children, but I also wanted to show different



people with different views and different values within the film."

While Kore-eda might now be an honorary Korean after making *Broker*, he recognises just how well the nation's filmmakers are doing. Whether it's the Oscar-winner *Parasite*, or the runaway Netflix hit *Squid Game*, which "really brought home the strength and momentum that's in Korean film and TV right now". Although he's planning a school-set drama back in Japan next, he's clearly got a taste for foreign film work. "After that, if possible, I'd like to make something... outside of Japan," he says. A Kore-eda film in the UK, maybe? We can but hope.

JAMES MOTTRAM

'I wanted to show that life is a blessing and to affirm the lives of these children'
KORE-EDA
HIROKAZU

BROKER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 24 FEBRUARY.

**You talkin' to me?**

I am, from Massachusetts on the East Coast. I live here about eight months out of the year, in a small seaside town. I prefer it to Los Angeles at this moment. And it's very, very rainy and cold and it's nice to be inside looking out.

Do you have an off switch?

[Laughs] No, I don't. I don't think I have a total off switch. You know when computers go to sleep but they're still on? It's sort of like that. Even in my dreams I'm still working through stuff. But I at least know how to modulate and not constantly perform for people to get their approval. That's something I've learned in my maturity, I guess. My burgeoning maturity! In my early twenties, when I wanted to become a performer, I felt this desperation to always show people that I could perform. Always proving it. And while that can be fun, it can also be very selfish, and exhausting. There's a lot of stuff that only time will temper. It's like how something is made not sharp any more, like sea glass, y'know? How it becomes finally touchable. When I was younger, I was more of a broken shard, if you will.

Have you ever danced with the Devil in the pale moonlight?

I think I have, really briefly, and decided it was not for me. I had wild days partying when I was younger, but is that really the Devil? It seems like those are the angels – the party angels. You can be a party animal but a party angel. You're not hurting anyone. You're zooming around having a good time. I was a heavy stoner in college years. I discovered a love for smoking pot. But it's been about five years since I smoked any pot. I can't do it any more. It makes me too nervous and paranoid. I also have a two-year-old daughter now, and I'm at a point where every extra bit of energy, every bit of perception, that I'm able to attach to, I'd never want to lose it by being inebriated. I need to be awake or completely asleep. Nothing in between. I'm good for an afternoon beer, though.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

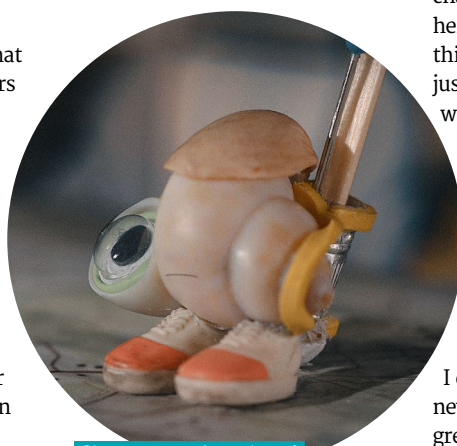
FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS.
FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.



IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... JENNY SLATE

What's your favourite scary movie?

Is that from *Scream*? I just saw that movie for the first time, two years ago, and it really, really scared me. I was too scared to see it when it came out, in my teens. My favourite scary movie is a tie between *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*. They both have the Devil, but what they also have are these mothers trying so hard, at the centre, and that's what really holds your attention in a different way. Ellen Burstyn's performance is one of my favourite performances that I've ever watched. I definitely did not watch *Rosemary's Baby* while I was pregnant! [laughs] Since I've had the baby, it's been very hard for me to watch anything where anything bad happens to anyone.



Slate stars as the voice of Marcel in the upcoming *Marcel The Shell With Shoes On*.

What would you do if you knew you had less than one minute to live?

Umm... I guess I'd try to find some root beer. I think I would try to make sure to find my husband and my baby and hold them in my arms, and maybe... go outside?

What are you really, and what were you before?

I think I'm really like a combination between a dog and a mystic. And before I was more like a parrot and, like, a freaked-out chef. When I get the scent of something or someone that I love, I'm tracking for it all the time. I want to be by their side and useful to them. And I really respond well to positive reinforcement and treats. I think I'm pretty easily trained. That's one of the reasons why I love being an actor – I feel more capable and deeply rooted when I'm able to follow instructions that someone that I trust gives to me. I love that, on set. And I like being in a pack. I don't like being alone. And I'm snuggly.

You're saying that a guy doesn't want a drunk, pregnant girl in a box?

That's from my movie! Yeah! I mean, when I was pregnant, I was not drunk or in a box ever, as far as I can remember. Performing that scene in *Obvious Child* where Donna is in the box, and Jake Lacy's character comes in and startles her, is one of my most favourite things to perform of all time. I just love performing scared. It's weird that I've never been in a scary movie before. I hope to be in one. I think I'm the perfect candidate because I'm such a scaredy-cat person, so I think it will be very believable. [Teasers suggests she should have starred in the *Rosemary's Baby* miniseries] They did that? I didn't know that. Oh, I would never touch it. Maybe they did a great job rebooting it, but I'm not sure I understand why you would redo something that has definitely reached perfection. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

MARCEL THE SHELL WITH SHOES ON OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 17 FEBRUARY.

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, DEADPOOL, BATMAN, DEADPOOL, TAXI DRIVER, CASABLANCA, OBVIOUS CHILD

Jorden Myrie and Bukky Bakray turn up unexpectedly to shake things up.



Q&A

Bukky Bakray

How did you get the role?

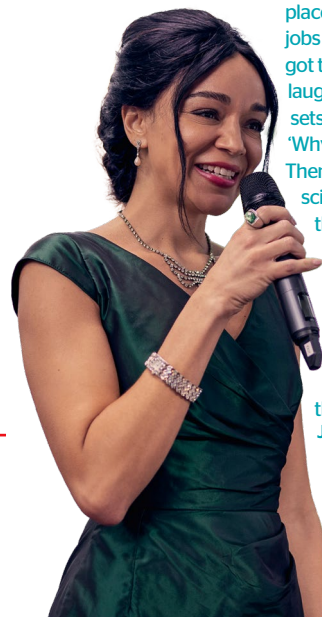
I auditioned and did chemistry reads. I don't want people to expect me to be good because of *Rocks*. I still want the craft to be proven.

What appealed to you about Dion?

I sympathised with her deeply, even though her life was so different to mine. To get, like, your inner child killed. I think people expect people who grew up in the worst conditions to be mad mature, but there's still a naivety. You can't skip childhood. It's gonna come back to you. She's outlandish. A firework. It was difficult for me because I'm used to being quite compressed and dense. It was nice to see a part of me that I threw away for a long time.

The film goes to some dark places...

It taught me that you don't necessarily have to put yourself in darkness and isolate yourself to get to that emotional place. I'd done that on jobs before and hadn't got there. On this, I was laughing in between sets. I was thinking, 'Why is this happening?' Then you look at the science, and the same thing your brain uses to laugh is the same thing it uses to cry, so why would you create an environment where the two things are different? **JAMIE GRAHAM**



OUT OF THE PAST

THE STRAYS A woman's secret history surfaces to splinter her present in an accomplished debut thriller...

You don't get too many British debuts like Nathaniel Martello-White's *The Strays*. Brit flicks comes in all shapes and guises, but kitchen-sink dramas and period films are the national staple, and low-budget features are often televisual. Social thriller *The Strays*, however, exhibits a cinematic sheen and controlled formalism.

"The image should be active," says Martello-White, hitherto best known as an actor (*Silent Night*, *I Hate Suzie*). *Cla'am*, a short he wrote and directed in 2017, was accepted by South by Southwest, and now his impressive debut feature is dropping on Netflix. "No image should be for free – it should be loaded with feeling and meaning."

Cla'am was a "comedy-horror about gentrification in and around the Brixton area." *The Strays*, though genre-leaning, focuses more on character drama as we spend time with a well-to-do suburban family. This seemingly perfect unit consists of light-skinned Black mother Neve (Ashley Madekwe), white father Ian (Justin Salinger) and their two teenage kids (Samuel Paul Small, Maria Almeida). But then a mystery duo played by Jorden Myrie and *Rocks*' Bukky Bakray pitch

up from out of Neve's past, and things go south, rapidly. "I'm influenced by the Coen Brothers and Yorgos Lanthimos and Michael Haneke," Martello-White says, explaining how Big Themes are often best treated by genre movies. "Sometimes you can make your subject too narrow if you make a realist film." For Martello-White, *The Strays* is laced with personal meaning. "I was inspired by my mother's experience. As a biracial woman, she has traversed different classes and had to deal with racism on both sides, and she had to code switch and find ways to survive."

There's plenty to unpack in *The Strays*, but the conversation concludes as it began – musing upon how this debut feels like a fresh voice in British filmmaking. "The trope of the outsider shaking things up is straight out of westerns," notes Martello-White. "You get it in a lot of American cinema, these white-picket communities, pulled apart. I was particularly struck by *A History of Violence*. We don't really make British films like that. I don't know why." **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE STRAYS RELEASES ON NETFLIX THIS SPRING.



EXCLUSIVE

TEAM PLAYERS

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Game Night's* directing duo put the fun back into fantasy...

Dungeons & Dragons, the board game, sees a dungeon master create a quest for ambitious role-playing adventurers to embark upon. Swap out the dungeon master for a director, those role-players for actors, and, boom, you have yourself a movie! If only it were that simple...

There have been multiple attempts to adapt *D&D* over the years, the most infamous being the risible 2000 film starring Jeremy Irons and Tom Baker. It sent Hollywood running from *D&D*, a property always seen as slightly uncool anyway. That was the case until suddenly everyone was playing *D&D* (thanks, in part, to *Stranger Things*). And now comes *Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves*, directed by *Game Night* duo Jonathan Goldstein and John

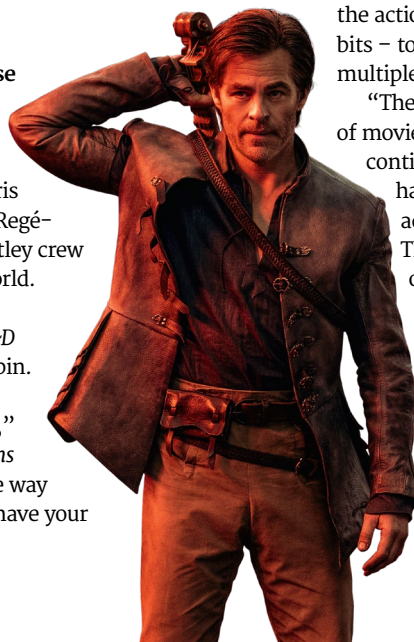
Francis Daley, and starring Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez, and Regé-Jean Page as members of a motley crew of misfits trying to save the world.

Perhaps to some surprise, *Honour Among Thieves* takes *D&D* and gives it a partial comedy spin. "We never wanted this to be a spoof or a straight-up comedy," Daley says. "*Dungeons & Dragons* presents itself in such a unique way that it is absolutely natural to have your

'There aren't a lot of these types of movies'
JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN

characters have a sense of humour. It's more reflective of people in life. You sometimes laugh at tragedy in order to be able to cope with it. It's a very natural emotion that we definitely wanted to explore among the sad bits, the action-packed bits, the dramatic bits – to have a really fleshed-out, multiple-genre film."

"There aren't a lot of these types of movies that we could rely on," continues Goldstein, "because who has done the fantasy/comedy/action-adventure movie? There aren't many of those out there." He says that the closest analogue is the Marvel movies. "You're always on a fun ride, and you're laughing," he adds. "But there's world-ending stakes in all of them, too, and that was the target we were aiming for."



Your 12-sided dice
isn't going to help
you now, sunshine!

EXCLUSIVE

TRUE CRIME

SAINT OMER Alice Diop's stunning drama tackles motherhood's greatest taboo...

Alice Diop's journey with *Saint Omer* started in 2015 when she opened a newspaper. Flicking through the pages of *Le Monde*, "the police were looking for this woman. She was an immigrant from Senegal. They released a still of her wheeling her mixed-race baby in a pushchair at the train station." The woman, Fabienne Kabou, had been accused of an unspeakable act, researching the timing of the tide and then leaving her 15-month-old daughter on the beach to drown. Baby Adélaïde's body was recovered by fishermen two days later.

Diop became obsessed with the case, but the articles she read on Kabou had racist undertones, with comments on how surprisingly articulate Kabou was. For Diop, there was a "fundamental contradiction in how I saw her and how the press was writing about her." The director was also well versed in the murder of Grégory Villemin, a four-year-old who was found in the River Vologne with his hand and feet bound in 1984. "The mother of the child was accused of being the murderer, and it was totally wrong," says Diop, and she suspected that a similar injustice might now be taking place.

When the trial began in Saint Omer, "a working-class town where Marine Le Pen campaign posters are still up", Diop made the journey from Paris to watch. But listening to the evidence, she realised, "She was more complex than my own perception. And it was

very interesting to portray the complexity not normally given to a poor black woman." In making *Saint Omer*, a fictional recounting of events, "It began a long process of understanding who this woman was."

The film makes some changes. Diop is now an academic called Rama (Kayije Kagame), writing a book on the trial. Kabou is renamed Laurence Coly and played with a subtle eeriness by newcomer Guslagie Malanda. Despite shared Senegalese heritage, they appear at opposite ends of the spectrum. Rama is pregnant by her loving partner, and Coly is accused of killing the baby she had with a much older, neglectful boyfriend. The two never speak, but Diop visually gives them a strange preternatural connection despite the stark differences in Rama's chic Parisian fashion compared to Coly's dowdy brown clothes ("it's sociological how she's dressing, trying to appear like a little tidy middle-class housewife").

Diop's now making history, with *Saint Omer* being the first French film by a Black female director to be put forward for the Oscars. But she's keen for the focus to remain on the emotional truth of *Saint Omer*. "This isn't about what the results of the trial were, but about what this woman and the real tragedy was."

LEILA LATIF

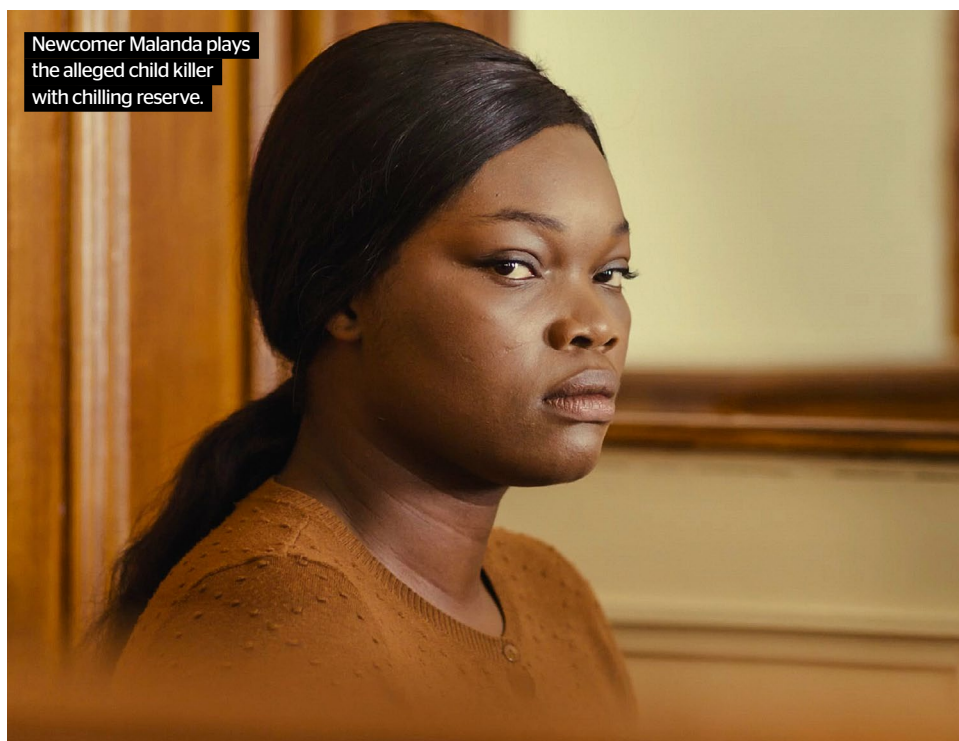
SAINT OMER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY.

Not only does the *D&D* tale have huge scope in the story, but also in terms of behind-the-scenes ambition. For one particularly ludicrous shot they asked their second unit team to head out on a helicopter and capture a live volcano on camera in Iceland. "Over FaceTime, we're like, 'Can we get closer, can we get closer?'" says Daley. "We got as close as a helicopter could get to an active volcano. It was one of those perfect moments. You couldn't have asked for a greater thing to be able to capture on film. I don't know if there are any other scripted films that have actually shot a volcano."

By the end, the shots were banked, and no one was hurt – a successful quest accomplished by these intrepid adventurers. **JACK SHEPHERD**

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 APRIL.

Newcomer Malanda plays the alleged child killer with chilling reserve.



EXCLUSIVE

ASSASSIN'S NEED

THE HANGING SUN A hitman has a crisis of conscience in Jo Nesbø's Nordic noir...

It was a very, very hard personal moment in my life," says director Francesco Carrozzini, telling *Teasers* what led him to adapt Jo Nesbø's 2015 novel *Midnight Sun*. "I was losing my mother when I read this book, and I took about a year before I told myself, 'Okay, I want to make this film.' When that process started, I was an unproven filmmaker who had an idea of a film. How many [of those] are there?"

A former photographer who's made videos for Jay-Z, Beyoncé and Lana Del Rey, Carrozzini may be new to features but that didn't stop him. Renaming the source story *The Hanging Sun*, he cast fellow Italian Alessandro Borghi as John, a hitman who's on the run from his gangster father (Peter Mullan) and hides out in a remote community. There he meets Jessica Brown Findlay's beleaguered mother.

"What fascinated me – because I was going through this tough time in my life – was that this character [John] also was very broken, always in search of answers," the director explains. "He was not recognising himself in who he was and wanted a new life and thought he deserved a new life." Given his own mother's passing, Carrozzini understood

this intimately. "I thought I deserved to be happy... because I wasn't!"

Filming in the west of Norway over summer, when daylight dominates and darkness rarely appears, first-timer Carrozzini is delighted and even surprised by the "freedom and trust" he experienced before and during the shoot. Especially from his author. "Nesbø decided to not be involved until there was a script. He gave notes on the script. And then he said, 'Go make it and show it to me when it's done.'"

With Brit stalwarts Charles Dance (as a god-fearing pastor) and Sam Spruell (as twins!) on hand, Carrozzini admits he learnt a valuable lesson on *The Hanging Sun*: always be emotionally invested.

"This film will always have issues, like a lot of movies," he says. "But I think people recognise there's a heart to it. And there's a heart to it because I felt connected to it." **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE HANGING SUN IS AVAILABLE ON SKY CINEMA FROM 20 JANUARY.



Jessica Brown Findlay

Are you a big fan of Nordic noirs?

Yes. I enjoy being able to watch something slowly unfold. And for things to have space to breathe. Something more than pace, pace, pace, plot, plot, plot – just because it gives you so much time to fill in the gaps yourself and ask questions before they're answered.

Whereas sometimes if it's all drive, drive, drive... you're exhausted. You're like, 'Oh my God, what was that?'

How was it to film in such a remote part of Norway?

It was phenomenal... To be somewhere so dramatically different from living in London. Visually, culturally, just in every way, it was so quiet and immersed in nature. You could just walk for miles and see no one. Very freeing. And it spoke so brilliantly to the characters that we were playing.

After this, is there a genre – like, for example, a musical – you'd love to leap into next? Do you sing?

Not in the way that you'd need to be able to! Like every day, all day. It's a discipline that I do not pretend that I would possess. I'd have to completely rehaul everything. Recently, I did a romcom for the first time, called *Flatshare*. And I'd never done anything like that. So much fun. **JM**



Jessica Brown Findlay's Lea has a troubled past but forms a bond with killer John.



Rosy McEwen as Jean, a gay PE teacher forced to live a double life.

EXCLUSIVE

HIDDEN LIFE

BLUE JEAN Georgia Oakley's debut tackles a grim piece of recent British history...

It's a sort of shameful secret that people don't really like talking about," says Georgia Oakley, referring to Section 28, the British-made legislation that forms the backdrop of her feature debut *Blue Jean*. Enacted a year after then-PM Margaret Thatcher's 1987 re-election campaign, when she stated that "children are being taught they have an inalienable right to be gay", this anti-LGBTQ+ ruling sought to prohibit the "promotion of homosexuality", particularly when it came to schools.

Not repealed in England and Wales until 2003 (2000 in Scotland), at the time, there were furious debates in the media. "I saw this moment, just before the law came in, as a moment of mass hysteria around the subject," says Oakley, "and also heightened paranoia for anybody who might be affected by it." With this in mind, she created a story about a gym teacher, Jean (Rosy McEwen), who keeps her sexuality private from those she works with – until she runs into a pupil, Lois (Lucy Halliday), in a local gay bar.

Already the winner of the People's Choice award at the 2022 Venice Film Festival, and with 13 BIFA nominations, *Blue Jean* comes partly inspired by real experiences, notably Professor Catherine Lee, who – much like Jean

– taught PE in secondary school in the late 1980s and was forced to hide her true sexuality. Sharing her diaries, she revealed a chance encounter with a student in a bar, who later confessed she might be gay. "Catherine said,

'I saw this as a moment of mass hysteria'
GEORGIA OAKLEY

'You're not and if you are – don't be! And never go back to that disgusting place again.' I could hear the pain that was still so palpable in her voice, telling this story. She clearly was such a good person and teacher – [and yet] she'd been pushed to these crazy lengths."

Despite a title that evokes David Bowie's 1984 song (which doesn't appear on the soundtrack), Oakley was cautious about being too retro. "I didn't want the film to be very '80s; I didn't want to screenshot any scene in the film and for anyone to be able to tell, like, this is set in the '80s. I wanted it to feel a little bit more timeless." And with good reason: from Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill to Qatar's stance towards the LGBTQ+ community magnified during the World Cup, homophobia remains rampant in today's society.

It's why Oakley wanted to veer away from a recent trend in Queer cinema, where the story "had to end in a kind of Richard Curtis happy [way]". Like C4 drama *It's A Sin*, which similarly told it like it was, Oakley was keen to show the tough reality of being gay. "I feel like, 'Hang on, we're not done with showing exactly how difficult it is,'" she says. "It's a daily battle."

JAMES MOTTRAM



BLUE JEAN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 FEBRUARY.



Soon after Toby and Rachel's marriage ends, she goes missing...

EXCLUSIVE

SEX EDUCATION

FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE Jesse Eisenberg speed-shags his way across New York.

It was incredibly uncomfortable," says Jesse Eisenberg of filming the many sex scenes in new Disney+ series *Fleishman Is In Trouble*. "It's very technical. Like when you do an action scene. It takes forever. You'll shoot a 20-second scene over the course of three days, because there's tiny little pieces that they have to get. So the action scene that is fun to watch is not fun to film. Similarly with sex scenes. It's this incredibly technical, process-oriented experience."

Based on the 2019 novel by American writer Taffy Brodesser-Akner, *Fleishman Is In Trouble* finds 40-something doctor Toby Fleishman coming out of a 15-year marriage to Rachel (Claire Danes), his life a chaotic jumble of parenting two children, reconnecting with friends and chasing a job promotion. Oh, and sex, lots of sex, with the advent of dating apps allowing Fleishman access to a world of pulsing flesh that hides beneath the concrete surface of New York.

It's all very Philip Roth – lusty loins and a neurotic Jewish humour that questions the self and the world around you ("Humour can be therapeutic," says Eisenberg). But with the tale narrated by Toby's old pal Libby (Lizzy Caplan), we're gradually offered new perspectives on the Fleishmans'

marriage. So while Roth's award-winning novels have been accused of misogyny, *Fleishman Is In Trouble* acts as a Trojan Horse that ultimately allows us to attain a fuller understanding of the women in Toby's life.

Eisenberg agrees. "Libby is an unreliable narrator because she's hearing about my life through me, so she's biased towards my position. Then as the show progresses, the narrator's perspective on our marriage begins to shift, and starts to sympathise with my wife's position. And so the show is, at once, a depiction of a marriage, but it's also someone's perspective on a marriage, who has a relationship with one of the characters and not the other. So it has an unusual lens."

But back to the sex (if *Teasers* seems obsessed, it's only because Fleishman is



Lizzy Caplan's character, Libby, provides the audience with a subjective interpretation of events.

'The show is someone's perspective on a marriage – so it has an unusual lens'
JESSE EISENBERG

– honest). So given that Eisenberg has wrestled with anxiety since he was a child and is a self-confessed neurotic whose every sentence is punctuated by numerous ums and ahs, how did he even begin to remove his clothes in front of the TV crew?

"We did have a closed set," he starts, but then goes into signature worry-spiked-with-humour mode. "But a closed set means they put some curtains around the scene, so no one can see, but you also know that it's being filmed on multiple cameras. You're filming it for a TV show – there's no amount of 'closed' that they can make a set that's going to be on TV."

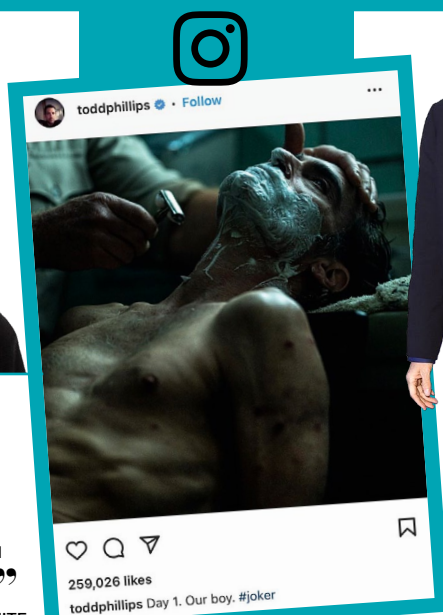
JAMIE GRAHAM

FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE STREAMS ON DISNEY+ FROM 22 FEBRUARY.



"THE LACK OF DIVERSITY MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE AND A BIT STUPID."

RICHARD CURTIS REGRETS MAKING LOVE ACTUALLY SO WHITE.



"Thanos? Come on. Give me a break. You saw [Avatar: The Way of Water]. It's not even close."

JAMES CAMERON WASN'T IMPRESSED BY MARVEL'S CG SUPERVILLAIN.

\$1.7 MILLION

SALE PRICE OF THE GOONIES HOUSE IN OREGON, WHICH THE NEW OWNER HAS VOWED TO PRESERVE



SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.



1 THE PLACEMENT OF CHANTAL AKERMAN'S JEANNE DIELMAN, 23, QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES ON SIGHT & SOUND'S DECENNIAL GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME LIST.

"HE GOES, 'COME ON, STOP BEING SUCH A PUSSY, OK?'"

EMILY BLUNT WAS GIVEN A UNIQUE PEP TALK BY TOM CRUISE ON *EDGE OF TOMORROW*.



ELECTION DAY

Tracy Flick Can't Win - a sequel to Alexander Payne's '99 dark comedy *Election* - is heading to Paramount+. Reese Witherspoon will return.



GOOD THING



BAD THING



ANGELO BADALAMENTI RIP

Legendary composer and David Lynch regular Angelo Badalamenti has died at the age of 85.

"I DID SUSTAIN SERIOUS BURNS TO THE TOP OF MY HEAD DURING THE SCENE WHERE HARRY'S HAT IS SET ON FIRE."

JOE PESCI DIDN'T ESCAPE *HOME ALONE* UNSCATHED.



"I KNOW THE END OF YEAR DISCOURSE ON FILM TWITTER CAN BE TOXIC AF WITH ALL OF THE 'BEST OF' LISTS THAT COME OUT, BUT THIS REALLY NEEDS TO STOP."

DIRECTOR DANIEL KWAN CALLS OUT ONLINE "AGGRESSION".



NEXT BIG THING



BEN ALDRIDGE CAN HEAR HOLLYWOOD KNOCKING...

Fleabag lovers will recognise Ben Aldridge as the “Arsehole Guy” who gave Phoebe Waller-Bridge more than one night to remember, while *Pennyworth* fans know him as Bruce Wayne’s future father, Thomas. Now, with leading roles in M. Night Shyamalan’s *Knock At The Cabin* and gay weepie *Spoiler Alert*, the out-and-proud Brit is making a mark across the pond as well. “I’m very lucky to be riding a wave of progress,” he smiles.

Shyamalan’s films are always shrouded in secrecy. What can you say about this one?

It’s about two husbands [Aldridge and Jonathan Groff] and their daughter who go away for a weekend at a cabin. What follows is a very psychological, horrifying take on a home-invasion film with a giant twist that plays on our deepest fears.

How was Shyamalan to work with?

Night has a very specific process where everything is storyboarded; he has the movie in his head and he knows exactly what he wants his audience to feel. As an actor, you are there

to facilitate his vision and it’s super-intense! Most of the film is set in the cabin, so cabin fever was a real thing for us.

You’re also in *Spoiler Alert*, playing a gay man with a terminal disease...

I was excited to be part of a film where a relationship between two men was at the centre of the film. We’re used to seeing queer tragedy in films, but this one focuses on their love over 14 years. It was a very powerful and emotional experience and I felt a lot of responsibility to do the story justice.

As a gay man yourself, what’s it been like playing gay roles in such high-profile projects?

I’m pleased to be connecting to material in a way I didn’t do in my 20s because I was playing mostly straight roles. I think representation is a very powerful thing that can really dial up our empathy and understanding. **NEIL SMITH**

KNOCK AT THE CABIN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY (SEE P52). **SPOILER ALERT** IS AWAITING A UK RELEASE DATE.



COMING HOME

NOSTALGIA A richly rewarding return to one of Naples' poorest districts...

What is it about Naples? From *Gomorrah* and *Piranhas* to Paolo Sorrentino's *The Hand Of God*, the southern Italian city seems to hold a special place in filmmakers' hearts. "There are so many beautiful parts, but also very terrible parts," concedes Mario Martone, director of new movie *Nostalqia*, which sets itself in the impoverished Rione Sanità district.

Adapted from Ermanno Rea's novel, successful businessman Felice (Pierfrancesco Favino) returns to Naples after a 40-year absence, visiting his ailing mother but, more dangerously, confronting Oreste (Tommaso Ragno), a feared criminal and former pal. "In a way it's a love story. Love between two friends," says Martone. "When

you are 15 years old, it's very difficult to separate love and friendship because the passions are very strong. It's very easy to get wounded at that age. I really liked these two characters, and the different pains they both have."

For Martone, it meant filming in tough areas where the Camorra – the Neapolitan Mafia – operated. While

'When you are 15 years old, it's very difficult to separate love and friendship'
MARIO MARTONE

there was a ceasefire during filming, it was anything but easy. “The actual day before we started the film shoot, two young boys were shot in the head right outside the church we see in the film. Miraculously, they survived. Often there are casualties. It’s a show of strength that can turn into a murder.”

Yet featuring a number of non-actors in supporting roles, *Nostalgia* shows a real love for the locals. "From the get-go a very honest relation took place with the people," notes the director. "Of course it's a very difficult part of town; people there have very difficult stories, difficult lives. But they understood immediately that we looked at them with respect." **JAMES MOTTRAM**

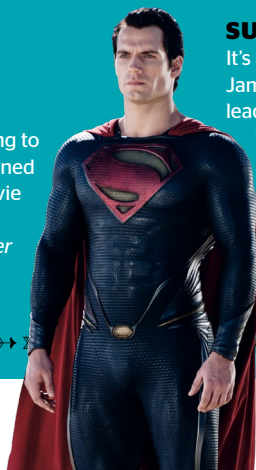
NOSTALGIA IS IN CINEMAS AND
ON CURZON HOME CINEMA FROM
17 FEBRUARY.

SHORT CUTS

The latest happenings in movieland... 

TOWERING ACHIEVEMENT

On the heels of *Gerald's Game* and *Doctor Sleep*, Mike Flanagan is returning to Stephen King with a planned five-season-and-two-movie adaptation of King's sprawling *The Dark Tower* for Prime Video. Can't be worse than the 2017 film.



SUPERSHUFFLE

It's all change at the new James Gunn/Peter Safran-lead DCU: Patty Jenkins will no longer direct *Wonder Woman 3*, while Henry Cavill's Superman has been grounded. Gunn will pen a *Daily Planet*-era Supes reboot instead.

BUSTIN' OUT

Ghostbusters Afterlife 2 will be directed by series co-screenwriter Gil Kenan (*Monster House*). The *Afterlife* cast are expected to be back for the sequel, which will return to the original films' iconic New York firehouse.

**LEE WAY**

Ang Lee will direct a Bruce Lee (no relation) biopic with a twist - Mason Lee (yes relation, he's Ang Lee's son) will star as the legendary martial artist and actor. *Capote's* Dan Futterman got the script fighting fit.

EXCLUSIVE

COOL CAT

PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST

WISH The flamboyant feline returns – and he's down to his last life.

A decade on from his last solo outing, Shrek's furry buddy is back to his old tricks – until he discovers he's been squandering his nine lives and his next death will be his last. A mythical Wishing Star could be the answer to his prayers... but he's not the only fairytale character who wants to get his mittens on it. "This isn't a repeat but an expansion," says director Joel Crawford who, with co-director Januel Mercado, sought to bring a taste of the spaghetti western to DreamWorks' latest animation. Here the pair take *Teasers* on a tour through the sequel's larger-than-life characters and genre-splicing universe...

1. PICTURE PURR-FECT

"We have really pushed the look of this movie," says Crawford, who previously directed 2020's *The Croods: A New Age* for DreamWorks. "One thing our production designer, Nate Wragg, ran with was making each frame look like a fairytale painting. It feels like we've been able to add a new layer of paint to *Puss In Boots*."

2. ANIMAL MAGNETISM

The Puss we meet at the beginning of the film, voiced as ever by Antonio Banderas, is the cat we know and love: swashbuckling, devil-may-care and always ready to charm the nearest señorita. "He's like a rock star who just goes on tour and parties," laughs Mercado. "He feels he's immortal and invincible, to the point where it's gotten to his head."

3. LAST DROP

It turns out, however, that Puss is all too mortal, one too many milk-fuelled mishaps leaving him painfully aware of his feline frailty. "Like any good superhero, he has vulnerabilities," says Crawford. "That was something Antonio was so excited to embrace and explore with us. He was like, 'I really want to show what's behind the mask.'"

4. GOLDEN GIRL

Learning there's a Wishing Star hidden within the Black Forest, Puss sets out to find it – only to discover that new character Goldilocks, voiced by Florence Pugh, desires it just as much as he does. "It's like 'The Good, The Bad And The Goldie'," says Mercado, who gives the *Black Widow* actress props for "the soulful, fun twist" she brought to her role.

5. BEAR WITNESS

You can't have Goldilocks without the Three Bears, who Crawford and Mercado imagined as "a Guy Ritchie, rough-and-tumble, smash-and-grab outfit." Olivia Colman, Ray Winstone and *Famalam*'s Samson Kayo provide the voices of Momma Bear, Papa Bear and Baby Bear respectively, making up what Crawford calls a "royal family of acting".

01



02

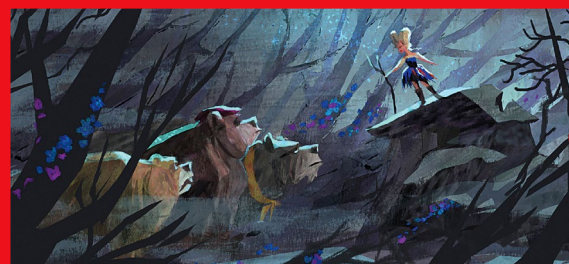


03



04





05



06



07



08

6. CAT FIGHT

Puss isn't without allies, though, even if one of them – Salma Hayek Pinault's cat-burgling Kitty Softpaws – has a bone or two to pick with him. "It's clear when they meet again there is some sour milk between the two of them," says Crawford, who praises the "reality" Hayek brought to her returning character. "It's like seeing two exes come across each other."

7. CAT'S BEST FRIEND

Heard of the Man With No Name? Perro, voiced by Harvey Guillén, is the Dog With No Name. "He's this ratty little mutt that has never been given one," explains Crawford. "But he still has an optimistic point of view of life and is like an instant friend, even though Puss doesn't want him to be."

8. HOUR OF THE WOLF

So who's the Bad in this scenario? That would be Wolf, a menacing bounty hunter voiced by *Narcos*' Wagner Moura, who wields a double-sickled scythe he's looking to use on a certain booted pussy. "We took inspiration from the Grimm fairy tales, where wolves embody fear," reveals Crawford. "There's an element of the gunslinger to him that fits into the western tone."

9. CLAWS FOR CONCERN

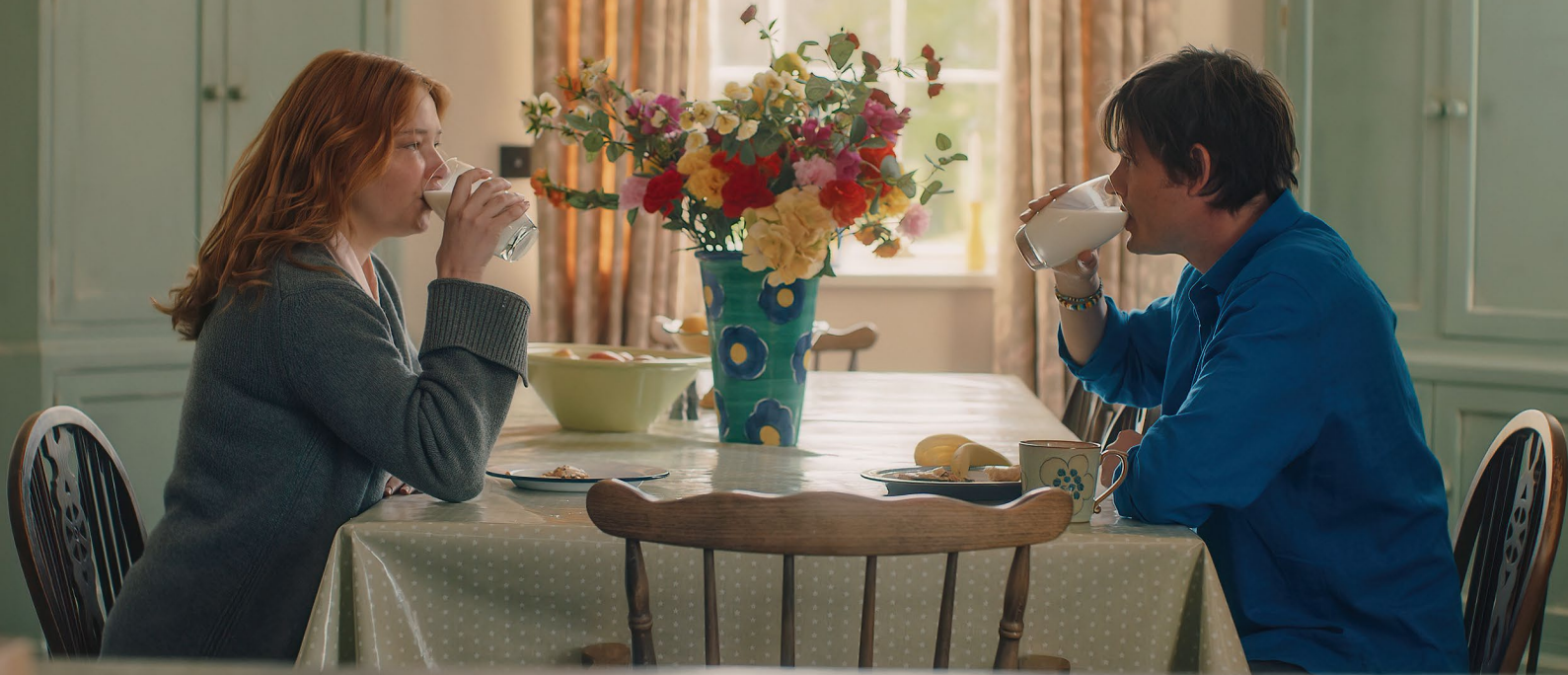
Puss will require every ounce of his derring-do if he's to get his last wish, with one sequence showing him clinging on for dear life. "There are moments in the film where he's in actual danger," says Mercado. "It gives the audience a deeper level of storytelling, where they find out more about the character and relate to him in a surprising new way." **NEIL SMITH**

09



PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY.

Improvisation is used to chart Patricia and Idris' unsteady history.



EXCLUSIVE

KISS AND MAKE UP

SHE IS LOVE Haley Bennett and Sam Riley make it up as they go along in Jamie Adams' latest.

Director Jamie Adams works with a "scriptment": a combination of script and treatment that means actors are given a story but no text. His latest, the entirely improvised *She Is Love*, sees Haley Bennett and Sam Riley feeding off each other to create Patricia and Idris, an estranged divorced couple reunited for a weekend.

How was it for you as actors to embark on Jamie's scriptment method to shape these characters?

HB: I had a meeting with Jamie to discuss how I could contribute to Patricia and then just followed the yellow-brick road. We tried to have the stamina to create and mould a narrative. It was about a moment in the relationship between the characters, trying to unravel and unwind what their history was.

SR: There was a natural insecurity at the beginning. I was very self-conscious that we were making stuff up. When you are doing a scene for an hour and a half, you realise you just have to completely surrender and be unself-conscious and not vain.

HB: It's really humiliating. It's revealing, like being naked and exposed.

SR: In front of people you've never met!

How do you find the trust in the people you are working with to reach that vulnerability?

SR: You have to surrender. It's like a guessing sport. If you just said a dud, you need to think something good will come within the next five minutes.

HB: You have to forget about looking cool or smart. It's all about trust, trust and trust. Also trust in Jamie with the next step of creating the film, which is editing. He could have ended up with a nine-hour film.

Did you two meet each other beforehand?

SR: No! Because we were supposed to not have seen each other

'You have to forget about looking cool or smart'
HALEY BENNETT

in 10 years. We met the day before we started shooting.

There is something very intimate about the film, a raw vulnerability. How do you distance yourself from it to safeguard your own emotions?

HB: I don't think I ever distance myself from it; if anything I become more me because I am examining different aspects of myself that maybe I haven't confronted for years. I become closer to myself, and who I am, and I use that to guide the development of my character.

Talking about vulnerability, you get to improvise singing in this film as well. How was that?

SR: Jamie asked me to write something for this and I felt so good doing it. We were already all in, and we had so much fun making up the songs together. So it's a similar feeling.

HB: I feel really free when I am singing – I feel deeply connected to my inner self. You stop thinking and you just feel, which is quite beautiful.

RAFA SALES ROSS

SHE IS LOVE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY.



JANUARY
Savings

Subscriptions from £/\$/€3*

SPORT



TECH



MUSIC



HOBBIES



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

SEE THE ENTIRE RANGE ONLINE AT

www.magazinesdirect.com/JS23

*TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Offer closes 19/02/2023. Offer open to new subscribers only. Savings are based on the newsstand cover price. After your trial issues, standard subscription pricing will apply. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue in the UK, and up to 8 weeks for overseas. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. For enquiries, please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3 pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings star Simu Liu is ready to fight for what he believes.

CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

THE EXTINCTION OF MOVIE STARS IS THE MCU MAKING THE ACTOR REDUNDANT?



LEILA LATIF
@LEILA_LATIF

When Quentin Tarantino lamented that “the Marvel-isation of Hollywood” meant its actors “are not movie stars”, *Shang-Chi*’s Simu Liu took it personally. Frustrated by Tarantino, and Martin Scorsese’s 2019 labelling of the Marvel Cinematic Universe as “not cinema,” Liu tweeted: “If the only gatekeepers to movie stardom came from Tarantino and Scorsese, I would never have had the opportunity to lead a \$400 million-plus movie.”

Liu was correct that nostalgia for the “golden age” of Hollywood often ignores that it was “white as hell.” But calling Scorsese a gatekeeper, a man whose World Cinema Foundation and African Film Heritage Project supports and preserves global cinema, is absurd. Tarantino’s filmography has problematic moments but has more diverse

‘CINEMA MAY LOSE A WHOLE GENERATION OF MOVIE MAVERICKS’

leads than the MCU. (Half of them are people of colour or women.) Not only that, but Bong Joon-ho, in his Oscar speech, thanked Tarantino for championing his films.

While *Shang-Chi* was a critical and commercial triumph, fellow MCU actor Anthony Mackie also believes superhero roles don’t create stars. “Anthony Mackie isn’t a movie star,” he said in 2018. “The Falcon is a movie star.” The big draws used to be Tom Cruise, Will Smith and Arnold Schwarzenegger, he continued. “Now you go see X-Men. The evolution of the superhero has led to the death of the movie star.”

For most film fans variety is the spice of life, and we can love Andrew Garfield in Scorsese’s *Silence* and in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Mackie, though, warned that the way things were going meant the only movies being made would be for “16-year-olds and China”.

To have a smorgasbord of genres at the multiplex, we need movie stars. Sandra Bullock’s *The Lost City* revived the studio comedy; Julia Roberts and George Clooney resuscitated the romcom with *Ticket To Paradise*; and Cruise’s *Top Gun* sequel was a return to old-school, non-green-screen action. Despite the pandemic pressure for a streaming release, Cruise insisted audiences wait to see this spectacle on a big screen. The gamble paid off because of a powerful actor who cared about artistry, not just a safe return on his investment.

It’s wonderful to see Liu and Mackie lead huge franchises. But if characters and not actors become the stars, cinema may lose a whole generation of movie mavericks.

5 THINGS

GORDON'S ALIVE

NOLLY Helena Bonham Carter and Russell T. Davies resurrect a neglected legend of British TV.

1 IT'S ABOUT A FORGOTTEN STAR

Russell T. Davies is time-travelling again. Having plunged into a dystopian future for *Years And Years* and back to the 1980s for his searing AIDS drama *It's A Sin*, a return to the Tardis looms. But before that there's *Nolly*, the story of a grande dame shockingly fired from her show in 1981. Sounds minor? You'd be surprised. "Noele Gordon was a fascinating, complex, brilliant and gutsy woman, none of which I knew before I read Russell's script," says Helena Bonham Carter of the star of ITV's motel-set soap *Crossroads*, a pioneer of daytime TV who was the first woman to interview a UK Prime Minister and the first woman ever to appear on colour television.

2 AN ICON PLAYS AN ICON

Bonham Carter's casting addressed concerns that Davies was coming to mock in the manner of Victoria Wood's affectionately withering *Crossroads*

spoof, *As Seen On TV* serial *Acorn Antiques*. "You don't become that big a star without a reason, and Helena's infinitely skilled," says Davies. "It's almost a one-woman show and I genuinely wanted to elevate it and really focus on her. Helena makes Noele Gordon a star."

3 THERE'S A MYSTERY AT ITS HEART

Sacking the mainstay of a popular soap opera was, agrees Davies, "such a strange thing to do. There were all sorts of theories. Did they do it to kill off the show? Did she have an affair? Was she a secret lesbian? These are the sorts of rumours and lies she had to deal with. By talking to everyone, I pieced together exactly what happened – I'm very proud of my detective work."

'A strong woman is seen as a villain'
RUSSELL T. DAVIES

4 BUT IT ALSO EXPOSES MISOGYNY

Nolly is about more than a soap star, doubling as a sadly timely reflection of how little gender politics in the workplace have evolved in 40 years. "For years, people told stories about Nolly being a diva, a bitch, a monster," says Davies. "When I started talking to people, I realised they loved her. I came to realise this was a drama in which a strong woman is seen as a villain: a powerful, unmarried woman without children makes men shiver a bit."

5 IT'S THE CLOSING OF A CIRCLE

A *Crossroads* fan from a young age, Davies sent in a spec script and was invited up to Birmingham to meet the team. Having been briefed and sent in his trial script, he waited nervously. "Then I walked into a newsagents in Cardiff and every single tabloid newspaper front page said 'Crossroads axed', all in a row. So that was my job gone. I genuinely felt a vindication when I actually got to write: 'INT: Crossroads reception'. At last!"

GABRIEL TATE

NOLLY LAUNCHES ON
ITVX IN FEBRUARY.



Helena Bonham Carter stars as Noele Gordon, while Mark Gatiss plays her friend Larry Grayson.



EXCLUSIVE

LEAP OF FAITH

CREATURE Asif Kapadia takes a break from documentaries to bring us a dance film with a difference.

Asif Kapadia is the award-winning director of such acclaimed documentaries as *Senna*, *Amy* and *Diego Maradona*. Akram Khan is a celebrated choreographer who memorably performed with 50 of his dancers at the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony. Put them together and what have you got? *Creature* is what: a recording of Khan's recent collaboration with English National Ballet that Kapadia is happy to describe as "my Covid lockdown film".

When the pandemic closed the world down in 2020, the work Khan was preparing at the time became one of its many casualties. But then producer Uzma Hasan had a brain wave. What if Kapadia were to go to the ENB's rehearsal studio in the London Docklands and capture what Khan was creating? He'd only have a fortnight to do it, with whatever crew and equipment he could rustle up at short notice. He'd also have to do it with zero experience of shooting ballet, with a cast of dancers only capable of so much arduous hoofing each day.

"I'm not a person who's into dance," Kapadia admits. "But I like trying new things and going into unknown places. It was an experiment in a world I knew nothing about. So I was like, 'If nothing else happens I'll have made a film in a space I've never been in.'" Sitting on the floor as Khan worked with his dancers, Kapadia took his phone out and filmed a run-through of the piece's first act. "I had no idea what the story was, but I knew there was something going on I could shoot," recalls the director, who had first met Khan on a National Film Theatre panel in 2001.

'I had no idea what the story was, but I knew there was something going on I could shoot'
ASIF KAPADIA

"For me it was pure cinema, like a silent movie by Chaplin."

Set in a dilapidated former research station in the Arctic Circle, *Creature* fuses elements from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* in its story of an exploited being (Jeffrey Cirio) that has been trained by an authoritarian regime to withstand extreme cold and isolation. The plan is to send him off into space and have him colonise new worlds. But their guinea pig has other ideas once he meets a lowly cleaner (Erina Takahashi) who inspires him to begin thinking for himself.

Contemporary dance and silent movie stylings clash in Asif Kapadia's *Creature*.



"The more I watched it the more I understood the narrative and the characters," says Kapadia, who cites Wim Wenders' *Pina* and Lars von Trier's *Dogville* as his artistic inspirations. "It's a tragic love story done in a futuristic way. It might be the first time a lot of people will have seen any form of dance. Hopefully they will come along for the ride, and people who already know about this space will come along too." **NEIL SMITH**

CREATURE RELEASES IN CINEMAS ON 24 FEBRUARY.

IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Editor-at-Large **JAMIE GRAHAM** lifts the lid on film journalism.

Yesterday I was crossing the kitchen intent on popping two eggs into a saucepan to boil for breakfast, when my wife called goodbye as she set off for work. I scurried to the front door to say farewell... and returned to the kitchen with empty hands. Where the eggs had gone was a mystery. Somewhere en route to the front door I'd put them down, meaning they really had to be in the living room, but I checked on top of every surface and under every cushion on the sofa and chairs and they'd evaporated into thin air.

The mystery remained unsolved for 27 hours until I went to put up a newly arrived Christmas card and found the eggs on the mantelpiece, hidden behind the card from Aunt Gilly. I have a habit of absent-mindedly tucking things away, like when I lost my driving licence after putting it 'somewhere safe' and found it five years later, hidden inside the DVD sleeve of *Violent Cop* in my Beat Takeshi box set.

BLUNDER BUS

Regular readers of this column will know that I live with my head full of movies and bumble through day-to-day life like the love child of Monsieur Hulot and Mr. Bean. Over the years, I have turned up to press screenings a week early (better than a week late, I'm sure you'd agree), fallen asleep while interviewing a Hollywood star (a long story, which was shared in one of my first columns) and travelled all the way to Atlanta to spend an entire set visit in a toilet with food poisoning while the A-list cast shot a dinner-table scene not 15 feet away.

So often, in fact, do I undergo these types of mishaps and misadventures that people sometimes ask me which is my worst, much like other film journos are frequently asked who's the best person they've ever interviewed. My answer is usually the time I left my hotel in Los Angeles to travel to the *Jupiter Ascending* junket across town, marvelling all the while at how they'd put on an entire press

THIS MONTH...
**RELIVING AN
INFAMOUS
HORROR
STORY**



'WORK SPACES WERE STRIPPED BARE AND DEEP-CLEANED'

coach just for me. Then a fleet of taxis arrived at the venue and disgorged 30 other journos led by a flustered PR who flicked glances my way as she explained to Channing Tatum why they were running 20 minutes late.

Yes, that is the story I go for. But my colleagues at *Total Film* always plump for another...

OH DEAR, ODOUR

At first there was a faint smell in the *TF* office, really no more than a peculiar aroma that occasionally caught your attention. You'd forget it for a day or two, then get another whiff. After two or three weeks it was constant and unpleasant. Colleagues tracked it, noses to the air like Bisto Kids, to my corner of the room, and I had to suffer the indignity of removing my trainers to prove it was not my feet.

By week four, work spaces were being stripped bare and deep-cleaned, the carpet shampooed. But the bouquet of sanitising potions soon wore off to again

reveal the stench, no longer creeping across the office but smothering it like a mildewed shroud on a month-old corpse.

And then I found it. Six weeks in. Down the back of the radiator. There lurked a screwed-up plastic bag, and inside the bag was a hard-boiled egg, its shell cracked open and a black gunge leaking out to slop and slosh in the bottom of the bag. I gagged. And while I didn't know how the package had got behind the radiator, I admittedly was on a weird diet at the time and often brought in hard-boiled eggs to have for lunch, so there was no question that this suppurating horror was on me.

The eggs that ended up hidden behind Aunt Gilly's Christmas card reminded me of it. But at least this time I found them in time. And as I ate them for breakfast the next day, I contented myself with the thought: "It doesn't always happen to a film journalist."



No egg is safe around our Jamie.

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE... FOR MORE MISADVENTURES, FOLLOW: @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON TWITTER.



Leads Ali Junejo and Alina Khan bring a tender charm.

EXCLUSIVE

FORBIDDEN LOVE

JOYLAND Pakistan's taboo-tackling transgender love story....

Oscar-winning Pakistani-Canadian director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy once said, "Every time a filmmaker makes a film in Pakistan, they should get a medal of bravery." Well, you really won't get much braver than this beautiful debut by first-time filmmaker Saim Sadiq.

Joyland tells the story of Haider (Ali Junejo), a married man living in a joint family who falls for charismatic transgender dancer Biba (Alina Khan). What follows is a moving family drama that explores gender roles and sexuality through a story of forbidden love.

"It was about processing my feelings around growing up as an adult male in a patriarchal society in which the definitions of gender roles are very set, but nobody seems to be fitting into them," Sadiq tells *Teasers*. "To centre the film around the trope of a love triangle – the relationship between a man, a woman and a transwoman – makes for an organic set-up to talk about these issues."

One of the standout stars of the film is Khan, who hails from Lahore's transgender community and manages to capture both Biba's fierce badass-ness and her vulnerability.

In the west, there's been ongoing controversy around straight actors playing LGBT+ roles, but for Sadiq, it was never up for debate.

"A cis actor can never pick up things that are so inherent to her," the director explains. "She brings an authenticity and lived-in experience to the role that you're never going to get [from a cis actor], no matter how good they are."

'She brings an authenticity and lived-in experience to the role'
SAIMSADIQ

As a film from a conservative Muslim country, the transgender element of the story has garnered a flurry of headlines, something which was a source of grievance for Sadiq ("I found it frustrating."). In fact, Sadiq considers the film as much a story about Haider's tender, almost platonic relationship with his wife, Mumtaz (Rasti Farooq), as it is about his passionate yet doomed romance with Biba. "I never looked at it as a film just about Haider and Biba, but Mumtaz as well," he insists. "The trope of a love triangle is common in the Indian Sub-Continent, but is problematic [in] how it pits women against each other. In my eyes, there was a romance between Haider and Biba, but the real love story was between Haider and Mumtaz."

At the time of the interview, the film is going through the inevitable storm of controversy, but the battle is being won thanks to a tidal wave of support on social media as the hashtag #releasejoyland went viral. "I didn't anticipate this level of attention, and I haven't processed it completely because it's so fresh," says Sadiq. "It felt like, for a month, all the country did was talk about this movie. But the support we got outweighed the hate." **ALIA WAHEED**



Haider's extended family don't take the news too well.

JOYLAND OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 24 FEBRUARY.

THE HERO

I've always been really picky," says Don Cheadle. Yet from MCU's James 'War Machine' Rhodes to his cockney crim Basher Tarr in the *Ocean's* trilogy, the 58-year-old is as comfortable in blockbusters as he is in indies like *Boogie Nights* and *Hotel Rwanda*, which gained him an Oscar nod. And as his Elvis-loving academic in Noah Baumbach's latest, *White Noise*, shows, he really can do it all...

White Noise, with its toxic chemical spill, felt like pandemic 2.0. Did it resonate?

It wasn't about 'Let's tell some allegory about what's happening outside of this.' We're kind of just focused on these characters. But when you sit back as a viewer... seeing the choices, editorially, that Noah made, to juxtapose these images and these stories, then you start going, 'Oh shit!' Yeah, it hits different.

You recently reunited with Steven Soderbergh for *No Sudden Move*, your sixth movie together...

And we're developing something right now together for TV. So yeah, we keep coming back to it again. *No Sudden Move* was an interesting experience, because we were prepping to go and then Covid hit. And we got delayed, and we were one of the first movies back. So it was very nervy. We hadn't done it before. How do we make sure that nothing's happening? And [I said to Steven], "You did *Contagion*... so in my mind, you're patient zero! This is kind of your fault!"

Marvel is developing an *Armor Wars* movie for your MCU character, War Machine. What can we expect?

'THE MCU CAN GO ON AND ON... HOPEFULLY IT DOESN'T GET SPREAD TOO THIN'



DON CHEADLE THE AMERICAN ACTOR-DIRECTOR BRINGS THE NOISE...

I don't think we've ever really dug into him, and now it's an opportunity to really explore his emotional life, his interior life, his relationships, his trajectory, where he wants to go, what his challenges are. Obviously, you have to pay off the Marvel stuff. And be in the lore of the mythology of the character and the MCU in general. But trying to really build out this character and make him a three-dimensional dude... is what the goal [is]. So I'm excited about that.

Are you amazed how the MCU has mushroomed even since *Infinity War* and *Endgame*?



Cheadle's versatility: *White Noise*, *Ocean's Eleven* and as War Machine.

It's bananas! And it's very expansive. And obviously now that everyone can show up in everybody else's story... I mean, I'm in *Secret Invasion*. So I'm in Sam [Jackson]'s show. There's a part of that, that kicks off what happens in *Armor Wars*. So yeah, it can go on and on and on... hopefully it doesn't get spread too thin. And there's still some quality control and not just trying to expand for expansion's sake. But there's a clear idea about the storytelling and what you're trying to accomplish with every iteration.

Are your kids obsessed with Marvel?

My kids are 27 and 25 and they could [not] give a shit! They were nine and 10 when I was doing it and they still were kind of like, [unimpressed] "Yeah, that's cool, Dad. Are you going to be at the game or not?" My wife is very grounded and I'm very grounded. We both don't come from that flash and glamour and didn't really get caught up in all that stuff. So my kids didn't really grow up in that way... that's not what their world was.

Was that your background too?

That's how I came up, in the Midwest, kind of simple, and I didn't really get into this for all of that. So keeping it in front of you, why you want to do this in the first place, has always been important.

Will you direct again?

Yeah, possibly, there's several things that are ramped up and could happen. It's just that it's such a commitment. And [there are] a couple of things that I've developed as a producer, and talking to actors they're like, "Yeah, that's a cool project, you gonna direct it? I'll do it if you direct it." So now, the gauntlet has been thrown down! **JAMES MOTTRAM**

WHITE NOISE IS ON NETFLIX NOW.

big bad john

Idris Elba's small-screen DCI eyes a feature franchise with a step up in scale and ambition. Elba and his team tell *Total Film* why morally compromised Luther can take on 007 in the movie stakes...

WORDS JANE CROWTHER





John Luther is in West London. He's abandoned his usual stomping ground of Hackney and environs for a Hangar Lane photo studio and is currently looking mean and moody down the lens of a clicking camera while rap tracks boom over the sound system. Well, we say Luther – but the man who plays him is, after five seasons essaying the conflicted TV detective, so embedded in the character that his alter-ego appears as soon as he slips on the iconic Paul Smith overcoat and red tie. Six feet two inches of imposing Idris Elba channelling a pissed-off Luther is quite the intimidating sight on a nippy November morning, so *Total Film* waits for the actor to slip into hair and make-up later before tackling some police questioning.

So the intel for those just coming into this investigation? Neil Cross-created DCI John Luther started out on the BBC in 2010 as a brilliant Serious Crime Unit detective with an estranged wife he was trying to woo back as he stalked the most depraved murderers the capital had to offer. One of those wily crims was Alice Morgan (played by Ruth Wilson), a sociopath who became Luther's nemesis and then companion as his ex and work partners were murdered, and his world became morally murkier. By the end of 2019's Series 5, Alice was dead after a lethal fall (or is she?) and Luther was in handcuffs. A copper who'd bent the ➡➡



➤ law to pursue the worst of the worst, the finale left viewers with a tantalising cliffhanger: would big John rot in jail or would his determination to hunt down wrong 'uns provide further adventures?

"*Luther* has got more in common with *The X-Files* than *Inspector Morse*," says creator Neil Cross when *TF* catches up with him from his New Zealand home. "It's not a crime show. It's a monster show." And to that end, like *The X-Files*, perhaps it was always destined to become a feature film. Certainly for Cross and Elba, that ambition had been a natural progression as they built their show and won awards. Cross, who admits to a fear of the dark but has conceived a selection of blood-freezing baddies over the show's run (Season 2's Punch mask murderer, Season 3's 'man under the bed', Season 5's night-bus killer), has always felt that Elba's towering performance as world-weary Luther deserved a cinematic outing. "He's got a titanic sense of presence, a once-in-a-generation movie-star quality. But what I love about the way he portrays this character, is that Idris' charisma, physical beauty and his physical power ultimately takes second place to an essential tenderness. One of the key characteristics of the character is that he's clearly carrying around a wound. When Idris and I were first having conversations about who he was, and what he looked like, and what he drove, one of my most important criteria was that we never, ever even attempt to try to do anything cool. That's part of the reason why I'm so addicted to using slightly antediluvian London slang, rather than cool, hip

words – I love putting the words 'tickety-boo' or 'wotcha' into Idris Elba's mouth. Nobody's said 'wotcha' in London since Dennis Waterman was playing *Just William*!"

He and Elba began discussing the possibility of a movie as early as the second series, despite Cross' misgivings about other unsuccessful TV-to-film jumps ("I'm haunted by the memory of *Holiday On The Buses* and *Steptoe And Son*," he admits). "We always wanted to do it because I felt that there is a real treasure box of stories," says Elba as fake bruises are wiped off his face. "For Neil and I it was like: 'Wow, it's one thing to be on TV...' But we always knew that we could slow it all down, take the time to be filmic, and take the audience on a real, big journey. What we want *Luther* to have as a film, is for people to walk out of a cinema, whether they know him or not, and go: 'What do you think Luther would do right now?'"

Scale up

"The trick of moving from a small screen to a big screen is to maintain the integrity and continuity of that character," continues Cross. "Rather than: 'What can we do with this bigger budget and this bigger scale?' – it's: 'How would Luther react in this circumstance?' So although we're on a much, much bigger scale, which both of us find very exciting and satisfying, it's still incredibly important to both of us that this is a story with Idris Elba's Luther at the heart of it."

The duo worked with the BBC and Netflix to transfer *Luther* from limited series to cinematic event, bringing along their Season 5 director, Jamie



Idris Elba inhabits the character as soon as he puts the coat on.



Who's that bloke in the waterproof jacket? Nope, don't recognise him.



Cynthia Erivo plays Luther's successor, DCI Raine.



LUTHER: THE FALLEN SUN

Payne. Starting the story where the show ended, with Luther in prison, Cross made sure to write for both fans and newbies alike as he conceived a big bad who could challenge the miffed former DCI. "It was important to all of us that we absolutely want to bring the fans along, and for them to know that this story sits within a canon of so many other stories," says Payne from finishing his final mix of the film in Pinewood Studios. "But also you could come at it not having seen a single episode of *Luther*, and absolutely know where you stood."

That scenario then is that Luther's incarceration allows "not just our killer, but a series of other killers to roam the streets with a little bit more terrifying swagger, knowing that Luther is behind bars," Payne explains. "But the more terrifying our killer's MO becomes, the more likely our hero is going to find his way to stand on the wall of our nightmares, and say: 'You're not coming in. Not on my watch.'"

'You could come at it not having seen a single episode'

JAMIE PAYNE

That killer? Millionaire David Robey, a man tapping into zeitgeist fears of our tech spying on us and the potential of the dark web. Robey has tangled with Luther before and been ignored. Now he uses tech as surveillance, discovering secrets that enable him to manipulate others. "If you and I had a big secret that we want no one to know, he loves the idea that he can be like: 'I know what that is. Come over and do this for me,'" shudders Elba.

"Robey really just comes from this tension between morality and ethics," says Cross, admitting all his monsters are what he's personally afraid of. "True morality is the kind of behaviour that you exhibit when you know that nobody is watching. But we've ceded lots of that private behaviour to the semi-private forum of the internet. The things of which we are ashamed, the things we think that we're ashamed of thinking, people that would have lived isolated lives but possibly never expressing their desires or their anxieties – or their interests, shall we say? ➡



It's all kicking off down *The Scrubs*, innit mush.

QA raine forecast

CYNTHIA ERIVO talks Luther's nemesis DCI and future outings...

This is the first time we've seen you in a role like this - what was the attraction?

I'm afraid you've answered the question. The thing that attracted me to the role is the fact that I've never played a role like this before. Most of the characters I play, I haven't played before, so I go for the thing that is unfamiliar and interesting. Raine was that!

Is it important to have a powerful woman in this very male world?

I think it's extremely important to have a powerful woman in this very male-dominated world, because - although it's a rarity to see - women exist in these spaces. So by placing someone like DCI Raine in this world, we remind viewers that we exist too.

What was Idris like to work with as the curator of the John Luther world?

Idris is amazing, I knew him before we worked together and it was a pleasure to spend time making a movie with him. He works hard and he's extremely thoughtful and giving! Truly a joy to work with.

You're currently filming *Wicked* - what's it like being painted green every day?

Being painted green has become a sort of a meditative experience. I have a wonderful team of people who work together to create the look, and they do it with a lot of love and care, so by the time I'm ready to step on the set, I feel really well taken care of.

What can fans expect from the film version of *Wicked*?

Fans of *Wicked* can expect a lot of heart from the film, a lot of singing. And if I tell you anymore, I'll get in trouble, so you'll just have to wait till it comes out.

You have so many projects in the pipeline and are so busy - what drives you in choosing projects now?

Different things drive how I choose the projects I take part in now because, as life goes on, your priorities change. However for me mainly it's about whether or not I feel like I can learn something from the character, learn something from the project, or learn something from the people I get to do the project with. Sometimes it's about where I'll be, sometimes it's about how long I'll be away from home, sometimes it's about trying something new. It all depends on where I am at that time in my life... but again, mostly it really is to do with what I find in the character that is on offer. **JC**



➤ – they find communities. I’m terrified by the idea that somebody, in fact, is watching. And it’s not God. It’s the opposite. We’ve all got these monsters in common. But however broad our canvas is, it’s always going to be this very particular sense that the monster could be coming for you next. In a weirdly Freudian fashion, I’ve made up a modern, Arthurian knight-errant who can come along and slay these dragons for me.”

The team knew they needed an actor who could go toe-to-toe with Elba’s Luther as his adversary and sent the project to Andy Serkis to consider. “When I first read the script, I almost wanted to throw it in the bin and have a shower,” laughs Serkis. “I don’t think I’ve come across anything quite as dark for a long time. And I thought: ‘In fact, do I really actually at this point in the world and time and my life, want to go down this particular rabbit hole of something that’s so hard to fathom in humanity?’”

That darkness takes in the idea of communities bound by shared unpleasant tastes and morals (“incels, I suppose you could call them, or people who have no real connection to other human beings in a meaningful way”), of cancel culture and spyware. And as Serkis sees it, our real fears of societal and personal nadirs are what make watching them enacted so satisfying. “You look at any streaming platform, and there’ll be a number of true-crime cases and then detective stories. And I think [our fascination] is that real search for what we’re really capable of.”

You’re gonna need a bigger coat

Thanks to Robey’s nefarious activities, Luther isn’t going to spend his whole film in the clink. Which means shedding prison uniform and donning that famous coat and tie to pursue evil beyond the London circular. “John almost feels like a superhero – he doesn’t wear a cape, he wears a coat,” says Elba. The demands of costuming on a feature film meant that the team needed 10 versions of the coat, a discontinued classic. That meant tracking down the last bolts of the material that designer Paul Smith had originally used and tailoring new threads for Elba – but aptly, the new fits were tinkered for a larger format. “We observed the scale,” says Elba. “Television always looks like television, even though it’s using the same equipment. But with film you get a bit more depth. And when you

We hope he’s got a decent vest on under that famous coat.



Andy Serkis plays Luther’s new nemesis, the millionaire David Robey.

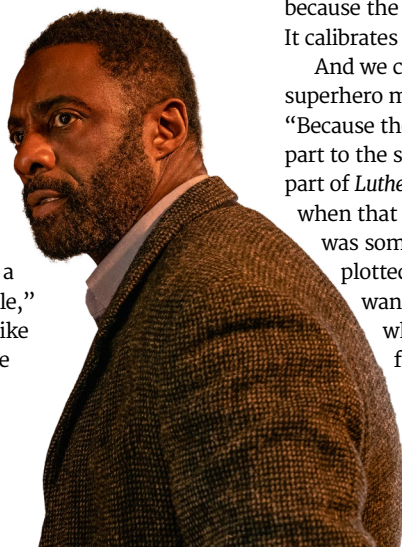
have that much depth, we made the coat slightly wider, slightly bigger, a bit thicker. So when you see it in a film, because the scale’s so big, it just fits in. It calibrates itself.”

And we can expect a purposeful superhero moment with the look. “Because the tie is such an integral part to the superhero outfit that is part of *Luther* – when that tie went on, when that outfit became complete, was something that was carefully plotted,” says Payne. “Idris really wanted to track that moment where the audience see the full outfit for the first time.”

Speaking of tracking – it’s not just Luther who’s

chasing his quarry. As a fugitive from justice, Luther is being hunted by the police force he was once part of. His role at the SCU has been filled by single mum and hardass DCI Raine, played by Cynthia Erivo. “She’s tough but she’s also got a bit of a bee in her bonnet about John being this guy that broke the rules,” says Elba.

“DCI Raine is Luther’s equal and opposite,” explains Erivo from the set of *Wicked* where she’s currently being painted green daily to play Elphaba. “She is by the book, by the law, every step of the way until she is pushed by circumstances outside of her control. That’s the way most people are, both darkness and light.” Raine also ➤



» acts as a moral compass within Luther's descent to darkness, according to Payne. "It's important that Luther is tested – our perception of his morality and his morality is tested. That's something that's always happened within the *Luther* lore."

Luther lore and *Luther*-land are terms the whole team use repeatedly when discussing maintaining the continuity and tone of the character. That *Luther* operates within a heightened sense of London ("We shoot London to look like Gotham," says Elba) and within a set of rules dictated by a decade of his narrative evolution. But expansion now means that though *Luther* will visit well known London landmarks – "We want London, to a new audience, and an international audience, to be instantly recognisable," says Elba – his world opens up to an international stage. That includes action sequences in an unidentified snowy location – though he's still wearing his beloved coat regardless of the weather. Globetrotting British badass with excellent tailoring and little regard for authority? Remind you of anyone?

has this undeniable grit that runs through its DNA," agrees Erivo. "What is new and I think really exciting is that *Luther* is starting to branch outside of the UK and into the wider world, and I think that is the thing that makes it grow from a series to a franchise."

Ah, the F word. Elba is unapologetic about his desire to make *Luther* multi-movie. "One hundred per cent, it is a franchise. We're desperate to take *Luther* out of *Luther*-land, and put him in the big world. I think that's a really important characteristic of scale and growth in our films. I mean, can you just imagine John in Colombia, or darkest Berlin where it's really weird and underground? *Luther* could go to America if we want to do that. That, to me, is exciting. And taking the rules of *Luther*-land and transposing them to different environments is really exciting for us."

"Expanding *Luther*-land starts with London then expanding into other territories," says Payne. "I know Neil [Cross] is plotting quite heavily what the future stories would be. When *Luther* comes out of prison the world

'Can you just imagine John in Colombia, or darkest Berlin?'

IDRIS ELBA

"It's not a competition, but I reference Bond as a template for the type of film we're going for," says Elba, who's long been touted as a successor to Daniel Craig's 007. "John is a leading character in a film that he's the hero of. That's the comparison I'm making. Some films do them well – Bond is one of them. But my ambition for it is to have that sort of scale, that reverence. I want people to be like: 'Ooh! *Luther*, the first film? Wicked.' And to continue that. And then maybe later down the line, when I'm too old, someone else will step in to play John." Payne is similarly unafraid of mentioning the famous secret agent. "*Luther* is our Bond. *Luther* is the person that will stand between us and harm. I don't believe I would meet a Bond villain. I don't think they're interested in me. But my worst fear is that a lot of the *Luther* villains would be. And I think that what makes him our Bond is that he will push himself beyond all natural ability to protect you."

For Serkis and Erivo, this is a rougher, grittier take on the lone wolf battling baddies. "It's rough-edged – the dirty, murky end of Bond's swimming pool," says Serkis. "*Luther*

is different, and I think it allows for a whole slew of new stories. Then the [TV] series is a brilliant origin story to what this new world would be."

With both Erivo and Serkis expressing scope for, and interest in, their characters continuing into future exploits, the question remains what Cross might have in store for *Luther* should audiences demand more. Perhaps even a return of Alice?

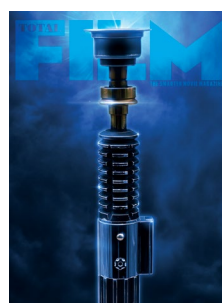
He chuckles. "This is going to make me sound like a terrible human being but one of the things that I love about writing *Luther* is thinking: 'What can I put him through next?' Putting that character through the wringer, through hell, is one of the great, perverse joys of my life." Not so tickety-boo then, but Elba is up for the challenge. "Alice was our biggest antagonist ever, and she ended up staying with the show as a character because of how big she was. And now we can try to do that with characters who live throughout the time-scale of the film – you know, picture one, picture two, picture three..." Who needs Bond, eh?

LUTHER: THE FALLEN SUN RELEASES ON NETFLIX ON 10 MARCH.



TOTAL FILM

**SAVE
59%**



SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND ENJOY GREAT SAVINGS!

TERMS & CONDITIONS *Offer closes 28/2/2023. Offer open to new UK subscribers only. Pricing is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 12 months and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please telephone: +44(0)330 333 1113 (open Monday-Friday, 8:30am-7pm, and Saturday, 10am-3pm UK time), or e-mail: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

SUBSCRIBER OFFER

**EXCLUSIVE SUBSCRIBER CONTENT
DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR
SUBSCRIBER-ONLY COVERS
SAVE UP TO 59% ON COVER PRICE**



**OUR SIMPLE THREE-MONTH BEST OFFER BREAKS UP THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
INTO FOUR EASILY MANAGEABLE PAYMENTS OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR.**

PRINT

£8.53 EVERY THREE MONTHS

13 issues of *Total Film* in
print over 12 months

SAVE 50%

PRINT & DIGITAL

£12.28 EVERY THREE MONTHS

13 issues of *Total Film* over 12 months
in print and digital

SAVE AN INCREDIBLE 59%!

DIGITAL

£6.48 EVERY THREE MONTHS

13 issues of *Total Film* in digital over
the course of the year

SAVE 50%

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY AT
MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM/TOF/B23S
OR CALL 0330 333 1113 AND QUOTE B23S**



25

BEST DETECTIVES OF ALL TIME

From craggy PIs to slick super-sleuths to tenacious journos, the movie detective is a genre-defining figure almost as old as cinema. Join us, then, as we celebrate those who variously use their brains, brawn and/or bravado to crack crimes, right wrongs and dole out justice, one clue at a time.

WORDS DAVE BRADLEY, TIM COLEMAN, RICHARD EDWARDS, MATT GLASBY, JAMIE GRAHAM, JOEL HARLEY, JAMES MOTTRAM, NEIL SMITH, PAUL TANTER



25

FLETCH

CHEVY CHASE, JON HAMM

KEY FILMS *Fletch* (1985),
Confess, Fletch (2022)

Made famous by Chase (and respectfully rebooted with Hamm), investigative reporter Irwin M. Fletcher might not be good with deadlines but he's a stupendous sleuth, keen on disguises and fake names (Dr. Rosenpenis, John Cocktolstoy), and good on roller skates...

KEY CASE Drug trafficking on Los Angeles' beaches, "the shame of the city".



24

BRENDAN FRYE

JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT

KEY FILM *Brick* (2005)

A high-school student who operates like a Dashiell Hammett detective, Brendan isn't afraid to get his hands dirty to find his lost love.

Despite the film's heightened style and hard-boiled dialogue, the look in his eyes says it all: this is for real.

KEY CASE The disappearance of his ex, Emily (Emilie de Ravin).

23

AXEL FOLEY

EDDIE MURPHY

KEY FILMS *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984),
Beverly Hills Cop II (1987)

Motormouthed Detroit 'tec Axel Foley takes to Beverly Hills like a fish to water. A piranha in everyone's Evian that is, causing a scene wherever he goes, trampling red tape and biting privileged white folks on their flabby asses. Murphy's charisma matches '80s Cruise – *Beverly Hills Cop* was the first of seven Murphy films on the bounce to open at number one.

KEY CASE Axel avenges a friend's murder and uncovers a major drugs conspiracy in the original movie.



COLUMBO

PETER FALK

KEY TV *Prescription: Murder* (1968),
Murder By The Book (1971)

22 Peter Falk played the shrewd-but-shabby LAPD lieutenant in 69 TV films. Columbo seems like a collection of quirks – raincoat, ramshackle car, catchphrase "Just one more thing..." – but his interrogations are borderline Socratic. *Sherlock* creator Steven Moffat is a fan, and summarised the character to *Crime Scene* mag as "a friendly smile, a steel-trap mind, and the heart of a joyful sadist".

KEY CASE Columbo investigates a TV detective (meta!) played with panache by William Shatner (*Fade In To Murder*, 1976).



EDDIE VALIANT

BOB HOSKINS

KEY FILM *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)

20 A self-confessed "short, fat, middle-aged man with a bald head" isn't the most obvious choice to channel a Philip Marlowe type, but Hoskins balanced comedy chops and pathos as the case-hardened detective seeking solace in drink following his brother's death at the hands of a toon.

The technological achievements of combining cartoon and live action are still unmatched 35 years later, but the process had a lasting effect on the actor. "It screwed up my brain," Hoskins lamented, insisting he couldn't stop hallucinating cartoon characters.

KEY CASE Saving Toon Town from Judge Doom while exonerating Roger Rabbit.



BENOIT BLANC

DANIEL CRAIG

KEY FILMS *Knives Out* (2019),
Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery (2022)

21 He might have a yen for tweed and sound like Foghorn Leghorn, but you'd be unwise to underestimate Southern-accented detective Blanc and his capacity to solve the most fiendish of mysteries. "I try to play him as unjudgemental as possible," says Craig. "He has to be open so people want to open up to him. He wants to disarm – and to alienate people with his smarts goes against his technique."

KEY CASE Did *Knives Out*'s Harlan Thrombey take his own life or was he murdered?



JANE TENNISON

HELEN MIRREN, STEFANIE MARTINI

KEY TV *Prime Suspect S3* (1993),
Prime Suspect S4 (1995)

19 "Extremely directed, ambitious, talented and very uncompromising," said Mirren of her groundbreaking TV detective, DCI Jane Tennison. Though briefly played by Martini in short-lived prequel series *Prime Suspect 1973*, it was Mirren's stellar Emmy and Bafta-winning portrayal of a woman operating in the male-dominated Metropolitan Police Service that trailblazed. As she rose through the ranks, self-medicating with booze to counter the daily horrors she faces, you could hear the sound of glass ceilings shattering.

KEY CASE Taking on a paedophile ring, following the murder of a 17-year-old male sex worker.



18

EZEKIEL 'EASY' RAWLINS

DENZEL WASHINGTON

KEY FILM *Devil In A Blue Dress* (1995)

Walter Mosley has written 15 books featuring Rawlins, a WW2 veteran turned LA PI whose cases expose the tough hand African Americans got dealt in post-war America.

Only one has been filmed, though, with Washington bringing a cool authority to what should have become a signature role.

KEY CASE A hunt for a politician's girlfriend that's anything but easy.



17

WENDELL 'BUD' WHITE

RUSSELL CROWE

KEY FILM *L.A. Confidential* (1997)

This LAPD bruiser with a bleeding heart moves from hired muscle to crusading hero in Curtis Hanson's noir masterpiece when he realises the whole system is corrupt as hell. Anxious about being replaced by Sean Penn, Crowe attacks his breakout role - and the on-screen perps - with furniture-splintering fury.

KEY CASE The Nite Owl massacre and its - massive - fallout.

16

FRANK BULLITT

STEVE McQUEEN

KEY FILMS *Bullitt* (1968)

When tasked with guarding a gangster-turned-witness, SFPD detective Lieutenant Frank Bullitt spends a weekend from hell filled with double-crosses, shoot-outs and - with his Ford Mustang careering through San Fran - one of the finest car chases

in cinema history.

McQueen too was never better than as a grizzled cop living "in a sewer" yet still trying to do the right thing.

KEY CASE Protecting mobster Johnny Ross from assassins.



'DIRTY' HARRY CALLAHAN

CLINT EASTWOOD

KEY FILMS *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Magnum Force* (1973)

15 Inspector Harold Francis Callahan of the SFPD stresses the anti in anti-hero. Authoritarian at best, fascist at worst, he's liable to shoot first and ask questions later. "When a naked man is chasing a woman through a dark alley with a butcher knife and a hard-on, I figure he isn't out collecting for the Red Cross," he spits after acting as judge, jury and executioner early in the first of five films. The American Film Institute named Harry's trademark .44 Magnum the second greatest movie weapon of all time, only beaten by *Star Wars*' lightsaber.

KEY CASE Hunting down the killer Scorpio (Andrew Robinson) in *Dirty Harry*.



JIMMY 'POPEYE' DOYLE

GENE HACKMAN

KEY FILMS *The French Connection* (1971), *French Connection II* (1975)

13 Hackman bagged an Oscar as a hard-boiled NYC narc hunting a heroin smuggler in William Friedkin's 1971 original. Based on a real-life cop, Popeye is all rough edges with a problematic personal side: a rule-breaking, racist womaniser, he's also obsessively dedicated, as demonstrated in one of cinema's great car chases as he pursues an elevated train. John Frankenheimer's sequel continued the story - with Hackman heading to France - followed by a 1986 TV movie (though with Ed O'Neill playing Popeye this time). Meanwhile, Hackman showed his affinity for murky mystery elsewhere as P.I. Harry Moseby in *Night Moves* (1975).

KEY CASE Closing in on French drug smuggler Alain Charnier (Fernando Rey).



JESSICA FLETCHER

ANGELA LANSBURY

KEY TV *Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996)

14 Murderers never stood a chance when Fletcher was around, this retired English teacher being as adept at identifying killers as she was at penning bestselling mystery novels. Yet the character didn't come instantly to Lansbury, who only won the role after Jean Stapleton and Doris Day turned it down. "She started off a little bit goofy," the actress would later recall. "But finally I made her a woman of my age and my intellect."

KEY CASE We had two detectives for the price of one in *Murder's* 1986 crossover with *Magnum*, P.I.





CHAN WING-YAN

TONY LEUNG

KEY FILMS *Infernal Affairs* (2002), *Infernal Affairs III* (2003)

12 When cadet Chan is expelled from the Hong Kong Police Force it's a ruse so he can go undercover with ruthless triad boss Hon Sam (Eric Tsang); a deadly gambit given Hon has his own mole amidst the cops. As time progresses and the two spies circle each other, the line between them starts to dissolve and Chan struggles to keep his identity in check. Remade by Scorsese as his Oscar-winning *The Departed* (2006), the original still cuts to the bone, not least because of the performance from megastar Leung (*In The Mood For Love*), who is by turns hardened and vulnerable. Leung would reprise his role the following year in the *Infernal* threequel – set both before and after the original – playing Chan in flashback to flesh out the intrigue.

KEY CASE Fighting police corruption and the Hong Kong mob.



WILLIAM SOMERSET

MORGAN FREEMAN

KEY FILM *Se7en* (1995)

11 The world-weary cop is a movie cliché but William Somerset has reason to be wearier than most. Just a week from retirement, he's aching to get away from the hellish city he serves. Then, a career-defining case lands on his desk. Somerset quickly realises John Doe's first victim isn't a one-off, and asks to be reassigned. Request denied, he puts his "big brain" to work, pulling an all-nighter revising John Milton and the seven deadly sins. Ironically, working the case with rookie detective David Mills (Brad Pitt) makes Somerset feel more alive than he has in years, until *that* ending gives Doe the upper hand. "Ernest Hemingway once wrote, 'The world is a fine place and worth fighting for,'" he says. "I agree with the second part."

KEY CASE John Doe's seven deadly sins-inspired killing spree.



LISBETH SALANDER

NOOMI RAPACE, ROONEY MARA, CLAIRE FOY

KEY FILMS *The Millennium Trilogy* (2009), *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (2011), *The Girl In The Spider's Web* (2018)

10 "Why are you dressed like a teenage boy?" asked Noomi Rapace's son while she was filming the original Millennium trilogy, a testament to the physical transformation the Swedish actress underwent to play the cropped-haired, multi-pierced, heavily tattooed protagonist of Stieg Larsson's novels. Rooney Mara received her own Goth makeover for *Dragon Tattoo*'s US version, while Claire Foy "had to get muscles that I never had before" when reviving the character in 2018. Lisbeth, then, is no ordinary detective, her misanthropy, leather-clad androgyny and hacking skills making her a vengeful force to be reckoned with. "She lives by her own set of rules," says Mara.

KEY CASE Helping Mikael Blomkvist track down a serial killer.



JOHN LUTHER

IDRIS ELBA

Key TV/film *Luther* (TV, 2010–2019), *Luther: The Fallen Sun* (2023)

09 When we first meet dogged detective John Luther, we find him exhorting a confession from a serial kidnapper as the criminal dangles from a great height... shortly before letting him drop to the concrete below. It's this work in the morally grey area that typifies Luther's policing – obsessive, conflicted, and frequently as violent as the criminals he investigates. Heading up the Serious and Serial Crime Unit, Luther finds himself possessed by the darkness of the horrific crimes he bears witness to. For Elba, the bleak intensity of *Luther* is like a form of therapy. "I always go to *Luther* when I'm at my grumpiest. It's like, 'I feel shit, let's do some *Luther*,'" the actor says. **KEY CASE** Becoming involved with psycho Alice Morgan (Ruth Wilson) while investigating her crimes.

JAKE GITTES

JACK NICHOLSON

KEY FILMS *Chinatown* (1974), *The Two Jakes* (1990)

08 First seen in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, Nicholson's 1930s gumshoe is undeniably one of Hollywood's greatest private dicks. "A very cocksure detective who was cynical but with a hidden idealistic streak, who really thought he knew all the answers but in fact had no notion how evil somebody could be," noted his creator, screenwriter Robert Towne, who originally planned a trilogy of films with J.J. 'Jake' Gittes. The second, *The Two Jakes*, directed by Nicholson, belatedly made it to screens – Jake still jaded, still snooping around divorce cases – but it couldn't quite touch the mastery of the original. Who can forget the moment he gets his nostril slit – by a thug played by Polanski himself? A perfect symbol of what happens when you stick your nose in where it's not wanted.

KEY CASE Hired to follow the philandering LA water commissioner, Jake uncovers a nest of corruption.



MARGE GUNDERSON

FRANCES McDORMAND

KEY FILM *Fargo* (1996)

07 Possibly the Coens' best character amidst a sea of stiff competition. McDormand stepped up from supporting roles to lead her husband's blackly comic noir tale of kidnap, murder and funny-lookin' fellas in snowy Minnesota. In contrast to many fictional detectives with car-crash personal lives, "Margie" enjoys a loving domestic situation with a sleepy, doting husband at home and a baby on the way. While other cops strive to get inside the mind of killers, Gunderson just doesn't understand why they would do it "for a little bit of money". But don't underestimate her; she's super-competent too, able to break down exactly what happened at a roadside murder scene on sight, while battling morning sickness. Then she brings in a killer single-handedly and is home in time for snuggles. McDormand asked the audience at a 25th-anniversary screening, "Does it hold up?" It definitely does, don't ya know.

KEY CASE Tracking Steve Buscemi and Peter Stormare's pair of deadly kidnappers to a blood-stained woodchipper.



HERCULE POIROT

ALBERT FINNEY, PETER USTINOV,
DAVID SUCHET, KENNETH BRANAGH

KEY FILMS/TV *Murder On The Orient Express* (1974 & 2017),
Agatha Christie's Poirot (TV, 1989-2013)

06 In 1920, Belgian refugees were familiar in rural England because of the Great War, so there was logic in Agatha Christie's choice of nationality for her "bombastic, tiresome, ego-centric little creep" (her words). Many a heavyweight has taken a swing at the fastidious detective, from Orson Welles to John Malkovich, and most recently Kenneth Branagh. But by far the most enduring was David Suchet, who portrayed him for 24 years on ITV. Despite claiming to rely on his "little grey cells", the diminutive dandy is more interested in psychology than Sherlockian physical clues. And also unlike Holmes, a character who can exist outside of time, Poirot seems bound forever to a world of servants, steam trains and art deco.

KEY CASE Wait, they all did it? *Murder On The Orient Express* – filmed twice for the cinema – is simultaneously the ultimate murder mystery and the biggest cop-out in crime fiction.



PARAMOUNT, NEW IMAGES, ALAMY, PICTORIAL PRESS LTD, MAXIMUM FILM

CLARICE STARLING

JODIE FOSTER, JULIANNE MOORE,
REBECCA BREEDS

KEY FILMS/TV *The Silence Of The Lambs*
(1991), *Hannibal* (2001), *Clarice* (TV, 2021)

05 Surrounded by condescending men in suits, semen-flinging lunatics and demented serial killers, FBI trainee Clarice Starling is in for a baptism of fire when she is selected for an audience with Dr. Hannibal Lecter. From the cannibal, Starling gets a free therapy session, revealing her own troubled upbringing, and insight into the mind of a killer. According to Foster, Lecter's mocking of Clarice's southern accent was improvised by Hopkins, making her shocked and insulted reaction genuine. The cannibal may have helped, but it was Starling's brains and steely determination that took down serial killer Jame Gumb. Others have tried to fill Foster's Academy Award-winning shoes, but none captured the combination of raw nerves and pensive intelligence quite so well. Thankfully, Ridley Scott and his screenwriters decided not to go with Thomas Harris' original ending for the pair when adapting 1999 novel *Hannibal*, which would have seen Starling leaving the FBI and taking Lecter as her lover.

KEY CASE Working with Hannibal to ensnare serial killer Buffalo Bill.



SAM SPADE

RICARDO CORTEZ,
HUMPHREY BOGART

KEY FILMS *The Maltese Falcon* (1931 & 1941)

04 Dashiell Hammett's 1930 novel *The Maltese Falcon* introduced the world to Sam Spade, the perfect embodiment of the hard-boiled detective. As the author so memorably put it in a 1934 introduction to the book, a private eye does not "want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner; he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation." First played on screen by Ricardo Cortez in a 1931 adaptation, the San Francisco sleuth was taken on by Bogart a decade later in John Huston's masterpiece, a performance that became definitive – both for the actor and character. Sour and cynical, Bogart's sharp-suited Spade becomes the audience's moral compass through a story about greed, corruption and the worst of human excesses. While other actors including George Segal later spoofed Spade, nothing could touch Bogart's imperious, bruising performance.

KEY CASE Seeking out a valuable jewel-encrusted statue, "a black figure of a bird".

RICK DECKARD

HARRISON FORD

KEY FILMS *Blade Runner* (1982),
Blade Runner 2049 (2017)

03 Rick Deckard may live in the (then-) future of 2019 Los Angeles, but almost everything about him is a throwback to the hard-edged detective fiction of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. There's the trenchcoat, the drinking and the penchant for getting involved with femmes fatales – he even (in *Blade Runner*'s theatrical cut, at least) gets a suitably world-weary voiceover.

While Deckard undoubtedly walks the walk, star Harrison Ford always doubted the character's detective credentials: "I felt that I was a detective who did very little detecting." That's perhaps a tad harsh, because – while Deckard doesn't display the levels of deduction we'd see from Poirot or Sherlock – he asks enough of the right questions to complete his mission, albeit with a healthy dose of good fortune along the way.

By the time we meet him again in *Blade Runner 2049*, Deckard's police days are long gone – instead he now finds himself at the centre of the case, rather than being the one solving it.

KEY CASE Tracking down Roy Batty and other replicants who have gone rogue in LA.



SHERLOCK HOLMES

BASIL RATHBONE, ROBERT DOWNEY JR.,
BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, JONNY LEE
MILLER, HENRY CAVILL

KEY FILMS/TV *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* (1937), *The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes* (1939), *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game Of Shadows* (2011), *Sherlock* (TV, 2010-2017), *Elementary* (TV, 2012-2019), *Enola Holmes* (2020), *Enola Holmes 2* (2022)

02 So many actors have portrayed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective over the years, it's now possible to pick one according to your mood. If you like him arch and imperious, then Rathbone is your man, his run of thrillers between 1939 and 1946 cementing the detective as a man of dazzling if supercilious intelligence. If you want him more physical, opt for the knockabout adventures Downey Jr. made with Guy Ritchie, who reimagined Sir Arthur's violin-playing pipe-smoker as "the first Western martial artist."

If you prefer your Sherlock in modern dress, you can choose between Cumberbatch's mercurial eccentric and Miller's recovering drug addict. Thanks to the *Enola Holmes* films, meanwhile, you can also have him as a supporting sleuth playing second fiddle to his talented little sister.

"It's been done so well by so many people," says Cavill of the character. "But when it comes to *Enola*, there's a special something."

KEY CASE Anything involving nemesis Moriarty.



PHILIP MARLOWE

HUMPHREY BOGART, ELLIOTT GOULD,
ROBERT MITCHUM, LIAM NEESON

KEY FILMS *The Big Sleep* (1946), *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975), *The Big Sleep* (1978), *Marlowe* (2022)

"So you're a private detective?" asks Lauren Bacall's Vivian in the first film adap of *The Big Sleep*. "I didn't know they existed, except in books." It was indeed from the pages of Raymond Chandler that Marlowe first emerged as a hard-drinking investigator with a quip for every occasion. Yet it was on the screen that the character came to life, with Bogie's definitive portrayal establishing the template for a shamus whose sardonic wit masks an inviolable moral code. Robert Altman transplanted Chandler's gumshoe to contemporary Los Angeles in *The Long Goodbye*, encouraging Gould to play him as a self-mocking anachronism out of step with his times. ("While we were making the film we literally called him Rip Van Marlowe, as if he'd just woken up 20 years later," said Altman.) Mitchum, in contrast, was world-weary old school in *Farewell, My Lovely*, his craggy features and lethargic delivery giving his interpretation of Marlowe the mien of an Easter Island statue reluctantly stirred into movement. Neeson is the latest leading man to don the fedora, proving once again you can't keep a good dick down. "He's got ethics at the base of his soul," he says of his role in Neil Jordan's *Marlowe*. "I see him as an Arthurian knight of the round table, quietly seeing justice being done."

KEY CASE Bogart battling blackmailers in the original, Howard Hawks-directed *The Big Sleep*.



01





DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY #1



KNOCK AT THE CABIN

Twisty-turny storyteller M. Night Shyamalan is at it again with Knock At The Cabin, a woods-bound, home-invasion horror movie that morphs into something totally unexpected.

Here the modern-day master of suspense talks us through his process, revealing his secrets... but not those of his WTF movie.

AS TOLD TO JAMIE GRAHAM

MAKING OF

Which of my other movies is *Knock At The Cabin* in the ballpark of? The closest, I think, is *Signs*, because both movies are confined, to some extent, and they're both populated by such loveable families at the centre of apocalyptic events. I do think that you fall in love with both of those families. You laugh with them, are scared for them. You feel *connected*.

You know, the author of the book, Paul Tremblay, wrote it right around the time Trump was elected. He was feeling certain things about the world. It's really interesting that maybe he wrote it then, and I'm making a different version of the story here. It's a wonderful discussion that we're all going to have when you watch the movie. Is humanity worth saving? Are we good? The human experiment – is this working? The story is about a girl [Kristen Cui] and her parents [Jonathan Groff, Ben Aldridge]. They're vacationing and they answer the door to four strangers [Dave Bautista, Rupert Grint, Nikki Amuka-Bird, Abby Quinn] who give them a terrible choice to make. I think the things that I'm drawn to when I think of my own ideas, or, in this case, an adaptation, it's taking genres and then bending them in new ways, or changing genres from what you thought you were watching. That's the fun of audiences, for me. They come in thinking they're watching something, and it changes and moves.

How much do we give away? That is always the conversation as I'm making something, and then when I'm talking to Universal, because they've released a lot of my movies recently, the last four or five. The conversation is: "Hey, these are the things that are for the audience when they go to the movies, and these are the things that you can sell the movie on."

There are 'cards-up' high-concepts and 'cards-down' high-concepts that are in the movie. The 'cards-down' high-concepts are for the moviegoing experience. So we have those clear discussions, and even if the marketers are going, "Wow, if we took that cards-down thing, and just put it up..." I'll be like, "No, no, no. That's not how we do it. You guys are part of the storytelling."

That's the way I think of it, very much so, both on the filmmaker's side and then on the studio's side – that they start telling the story first. They start framing the audience. And so they're critical in terms of viewers' enjoyment and expectations. Even in the cadence of genres... if they said they're selling the movie as a drama, let's say, with some mystery at the centre, that would be a hard one to get people into the movie theatres with, because there's not enough high-octane. However, they'd be framed beautifully for an experience that they were unprepared for when they come into the theatre: "I thought this was a drama? Oh my God!" And their mind would be blown because they thought they were going to go at 20 miles an hour, but we're going 75 miles an hour, and



Four strangers gatecrash a family holiday to force the parents to make a horrifying choice.

they feel like we're going 200 miles an hour because they were prepped in that other way.

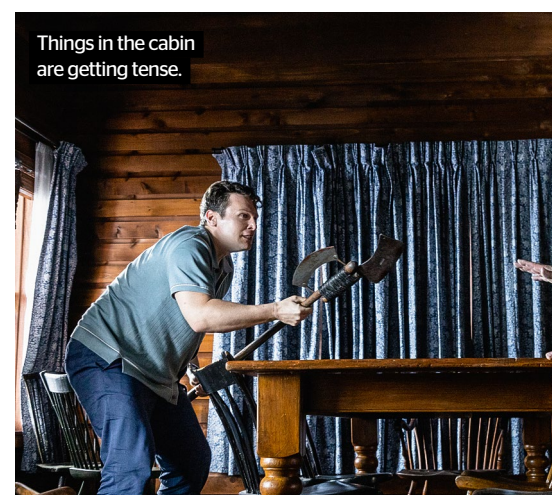
So you can see how it's kind of contradictory, because the more high-octane you put into the sell, they're framed in a bigger way, and you get them into the movie theatre to see the movie. But then they're framed in a way that doesn't allow that beautiful cadence of movement to happen when they're there. So it's a very careful relationship between the sell of a movie and the movie that they're selling.

STAYING PUT

Setting a movie in and around a cabin?

I think that probably the word I would use is 'liberating'. I feel very uneasy when someone says, "You can go anywhere and do anything." Ahhh! I can't think like that. I very much love the all-in-one-place concept, and then doing a very big, high-concept in there – a very emotional and big high-concept, but never leaving the parameters. That, I find, evokes the imagination in a way that I find really satisfying.

I'm not like Spielberg or Cameron or these masters who think in some amazing, brilliant, big ways. My brain doesn't work like that. For me, the dinner-table scene is the big action scene. It's how someone picks up the fork when they think the other guy is a killer or something. That's super cool for me. I geek out on that



Things in the cabin are getting tense.





stuff. So I kind of tap towards stories that are very contained and very simple, which turns out to be great for where I am in my career and my life, because I pay for my movies, and we do small movies. And even though they're released in every movie theatre in the world in these big ways, it's sushi. It's just really high-end ingredients – just a handful of ingredients – done that way. I love that. And I believe the audience respects that when they see it. Of course, we all love the spectacle, and all those wonderful filmmakers that use spectacle. But my brain doesn't work like that.

You know, there's something about this movie. Maybe it's because of where I am in my life, coming off four years of [TV series] *Servant*, or maybe because I'm older, and my kids are older. Or the confluence of all the years of filmmaking. Whatever it is, I'm able to... I forgot what the term is. I think it's called negative capability. It's a psychological term, saying to hold where you're not safe, where you're not comfortable. It's the ability to stay there. Don't try to tap back, or try to solve it prematurely, or shut down. Your capacity for negative capability, your capacity to handle the unknown. On this particular movie, I was able to sit there longer, and go, "I don't know how to do this scene yet. Stay there, stay there. Don't panic, don't panic." And then you talk yourself through it, going, "OK, this is what the scene is. This is what the scene wants to be." And you stay there.

TAKING STOCK

We shot this movie in 35mm using lenses from the 1990s. For me, it's just where my tastes lie. I prefer the feeling of film. I don't know, we could theorise about why film is significantly different than watching a digital camera. Maybe it's that it's an organic chemical process that's involved with it. It's organic things that are making these images, and you feel that life in it. The way its limitations represent light and colour and skin tone and nature – maybe it resonates more for us. I do believe that the limits to film are what makes it so incredibly beautiful. Even ourselves, how we're taking in the world, is a facsimile. In reality, there's a centre of our eye that's actually dark. There's a dark spot, and we're filling it in with imagination. There's nothing there. This is a representation of what we're seeing, and maybe film evokes our human experience more.

I also love the limitation of rolling film, and what it does to everyone [on set], and the danger of that – "OK, we're rolling film. Here we go." And it's [imitates whirring noise], and the camera starts, and the actors take their place. It's something that's going to get captured on this chemical substance only this one time. It's so precious. That emotion that's coming out of them is so beautiful and singular.

That's it, that's the only time we'll be there. And I hope the camera's catching it, and exposing the light in the right way. There's so much danger involved in it. I love it.

And the lenses are the same type of thing. There's beauty and limitation in the way it distorts the reality, you know? It isn't a computer deciding it. It's the actual ground-glass that's causing it to be a little soft on the edges, or causing the light to flare in that way, or its depth of field is wonky. Let's say you use an old zoom, and as you're zooming, the focus is not even and correct. And so you're fighting it. And what are you [the viewer] feeling? You're actually feeling a human being who's trying to focus. You're feeling another human being there who's bringing life and breathing as he's trying to get the eyes in focus. All of these things are subconsciously bringing a kind of life to the piece that makes it alive.

FEELING GOOD

You know, I'm probably the worst person to ask what audiences should expect from this film. When fans come up on the street, or at some restaurant, or whatever... Let's say a couple comes up. One person will be like, "Oh my God, I'm the biggest fan." And then the husband or the wife will say, "I can't watch your movies. I don't like scary movies." I'm always like, "Huh. Do I make scary movies? I guess I do." That's their veneer. But people get different things out of the movies. Ultimately, I love the ride as much as the indie drama of it all. I love them equally. It's like, "Hey, if you love feeling things, and thinking about your mom and your sister or your kid, then it evokes those emotions of your love and your pain and the scars or the beauty of whatever those relationships are." And it's a group experience. You go to the movie theatre, and you're laughing together, you're screaming together.

My favourite thing is, when hardly anyone can go to the bathroom. They're all just sitting on the edge of their seat for the entire time, until the end. It's funny. What that actually is, is you stop thinking about the fact that you're sitting in a seat, and you had three Coca-Colas, and your bladder's full. You're not thinking about that because you are so with the characters. You're more with them than you are with yourself. And so you don't know where you are. And the group starts coming together. So you'll laugh, you'll scream, and hopefully you'll feel something deeply that resonates with you. You'll have changed. That's the beauty of storytelling. You tell me your story, and now I'm forever taking your story with me, if you've touched me. Something you've told me about your kids, or something that happened to you – that's with me forever. And hopefully deep storytelling like that can happen with the rides. That's always the aspiration.

KNOCK AT THE CABIN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY.



DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY #2



ELIZABETH BANKS ON

COCAINE BEAR

Cocaine Bear tells the outrageous story of a black bear who goes on a rampage after ingesting vast quantities of abandoned cocaine. Unbelievably, it's inspired by a true story from 1985. Director Elizabeth Banks talks in her own words about bringing a darkly comedic horror thriller ride to life...

AS TOLD TO ANN LEE

Cocaine Bear is a horror comedy. There are a lot of horror tropes that we play with in the film. You know, it's a bear high on cocaine attacking people! But it's also a really fun character piece. It's about a great group of people coming together who are very much in over their heads. Everybody is going after the drugs, and nobody realises that the bear got there first.

[Jimmy Warden's script] was so unique, and I thought it really offered an opportunity for me to play on a genre that I hadn't really considered before, and do something out of the box. My first reaction was 'I gotta read the' ➡





» real story and understand how much of this is true'. Then I did a deep dive. I thought this bear was collateral damage [in] a broken war on drugs. I had a lot of empathy for it. I felt like this film could be the bear's revenge story.

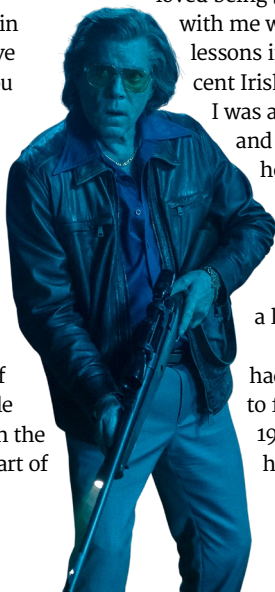
The bear's fully CGI. We worked with Weta Digital out of New Zealand. It's a very long process. We started with concept art, a ton of reference photos, videos of real black bears. We talked about the size and the markings on our bear, as we designed her. I really felt like the bear had to be photorealistic, and that if the audience didn't believe the bear was really there, the whole movie was going to fall apart. I've had people ask me after they've seen it, how we got the bear to do certain things. And I'm like, "It wasn't a real bear!"

On set, in order to create the CGI for the bear, we had a bear performer named Allan Henry. He trained under Andy Serkis for the *Planet Of The Apes* movies, so he knew how to walk on all fours, which requires prosthetics. He also had to do a lot of stunts because there's a lot of interaction with the actors. Although we don't see Allan in any of the movie, I really feel his presence in every shot of the bear.

CASTING SPELL

I was really lucky because I've worked with so many great actors in the past. I immediately pictured Ray Liotta and Margo Martindale in their roles. Jesse Tyler Ferguson is an old friend of mine. My children and I were watching *Sweet Tooth*, which stars Christian Convery, and I just thought he was so special. I knew Brooklyn Prince was the real deal. Alden Ehrenreich had been in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, so we knew that he was capable of a whole range of things, including being comedic. O'Shea Jackson Jr. is just getting better and better every movie he does. Keri Russell plays [a] mum looking for her daughter in the woods, who gets caught up in the *Cocaine Bear* adventure. She has one of the more relatable storylines. When someone [asks her who she is], she says, "A mom." I love that line. It's like the most important thing she does. She is someone that you really root for. You want her to survive.

I can tell you that a lot of people in this film do not survive – I won't give away who does and who doesn't. You want every death in the movie to be really surprising and shocking. I didn't want [audiences] to see them coming. Jackson Jr. has one of the biggest arcs in the movie. He and Ehrenreich play a duo in the film, and they are looking for the drugs. They team up with a teen played by Aaron Holliday in one of his first roles. He's just incredible – so full of life. All three of them have incredible chemistry. It's almost a bromance in the middle of the movie. A lot of the heart of



the film comes from those characters. Alden's character is also grieving the loss of his wife to cancer, which I think is something that you're not going to expect in a movie called *Cocaine Bear*. It was, for me, one of the most touching parts of the script.

REMEMBERING RAY

I remember exactly where I was when I heard [Liotta had died]. We were actually doing ADR with other actors on the film, so I had to break the news to them. It was so shocking because I had just seen him a week before. He was so vibrant, and full of plans.

He plays the drug kingpin. He's definitely pissed that his employee has dropped his drugs in the Chattahoochee forest, and he needs to go get them before he upsets a bunch of Colombians. Ray brought so much talent, humanity and warmth to everything that he did. He totally got the tone, and he was game. He was so much fun to work with. He also really loved being in Ireland. He'd found out recently that he's actually mostly Irish, which he didn't know. Many people associate him with Italians. He gave an incredible speech when he wrapped that had some of our crew members in tears. We were just all very moved by his joyfulness.

ROAR DEAL

With the bear, Allan was there for [the actors] to interact with. So they had an eyeline, they had something to push on, they had something that chased them. You know, it was very real. It was like, "Just act like Allan is here to kill you. Play it that way."

We had very little rehearsal. Most of the rehearsal was for stunts... getting people on wires, up in trees, being yanked [and] thrown. We had to really work with the actors and their stunt doubles to dial in the action of the film.

[We filmed] in Wicklow in Ireland, mostly. We had amazing weather. It's funny because we considered shooting in Georgia where the story takes place. But that summer [it] had a bunch of hurricanes. We would have been really out of luck shooting there. I absolutely loved being [in Ireland]. Having my kids there

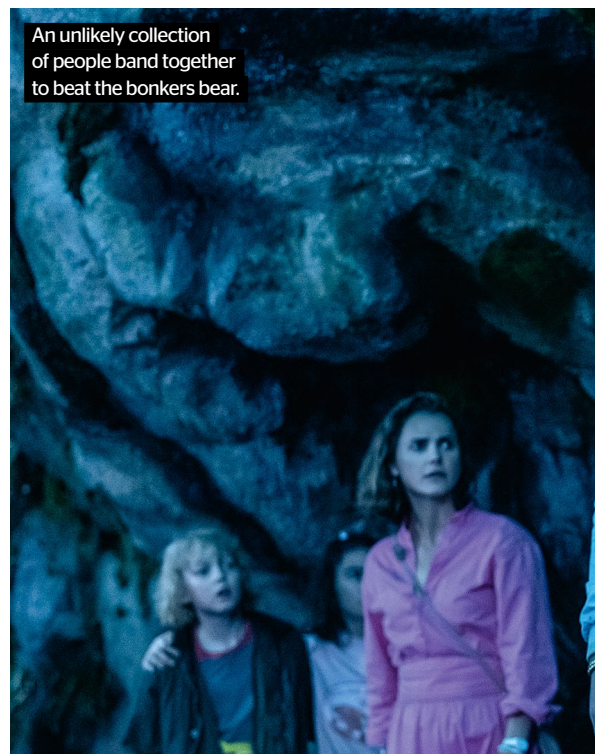
with me was incredible. They took sailing lessons in Dublin harbour. I'm 99 per cent Irish and I've never been there, so

I was able to kiss the Blarney Stone and do all the exploration of my Irish heritage. We were shooting during Covid so [the cast and crew would get together for] a lot of outdoor dinners under heat lamps, wrapped in blankets, [and] a lot of beach hangs.

One of the biggest challenges we had was props. It was really difficult to find American paraphernalia from 1985 in modern-day Ireland. We had people in America buy things



An unlikely collection of people band together to beat the bonkers bear.





off eBay and then fly them to Ireland so that we could put them in the movie. Everything from sandwich baggies to backpacks. It was really hard. And then the cars. In Ireland, they drive on the other side of the road, [but] in the classic vehicles from the 80s, the steering wheels are often on the other side.

FINAL CUT

The Coen brothers are a big influence. Quentin Tarantino, Sam Raimi, John Carpenter. [I loved] the fun and the stickiness of some of those '80s horror films. Monster movies, generally. We looked at *Jaws*, *Evil Dead* and *Stand By Me* – because it's a bunch of people walking through the woods. How do you make that interesting? How do you bring emotion and heart out of it? And then *Jurassic Park* because it's the same sense of seeing something completely inspiring and wonderful in nature, like a black bear, and then having that sense of awe turn to terror, when you realise that that animal is wild and could eat you. I am pretty strict about first cuts of films, meaning I don't need to see the three-and-a-half-hour version. I really trust my editors to show me what they think the best version of the film is right away. Then we go from there. Everybody's been very much on the same page about tone and levels of gore and the bear. That's been the longest lead time, putting together sequences with Cokey – [that's] how we refer to the bear – and getting Cokey totally ready for audiences.

One of the surprising themes of the film is parenting. The film is very much about fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, and protecting your cubs. That's one of the things that drew me to it as a mom, this story of how to be the best version of a parent. The other [theme] is the sense that the war on drugs was really ramped up in the '80s. This film takes place in 1985, which is the height of all these programmes to combat crack in America. So many of those policies went sideways, and this bear was collateral damage. Then the other thing is about nature itself. We, as humans, with our hubris, feel that we can control nature. [But] if you fuck with nature, nature will fuck with you.

Cocaine Bear is super-entertaining. If you want to let go of everything in your life for 95 minutes, this is a great way to do that. It's an incredible adventure. There are some really beautiful messages in it. It's been fun to see people relate to the movie. It's terrifying [when a film is finished and out of your hands]. That's my horror movie right there. There's only so much that I can control. All that being said, I'm really proud of [it]. I can sleep well at night knowing that I did my job well, and that if audiences want to see a movie called *Cocaine Bear*, I have delivered a film that lives up to the title.

**COCAINE BEAR OPENS IN CINEMAS
ON 24 FEBRUARY.**





DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY #3



MAGIC MIKE'S LAST DANCE

In Magic Mike's Last Dance, Channing Tatum's erotic dancer is now 40, in a relationship, and struggling to make sense of what is and isn't sexy – or indeed permissible – in a MeToo world. Director Steven Soderbergh explains in his own words why the third and final Magic Mike movie goes further than ever before in a bid to expose modern truths...

AS TOLD TO JAMIE GRAHAM

A third *Magic Mike* movie was kind of unexpected. We were a couple of years into working on a stage version of the show – a more traditional Broadway version – and that was all going on while Chan and Reid [*Carolyn*, screenwriter] and the choreographic team were also developing the live show. I'd seen some very early schematic workshops of the live show, and thought it was intriguing. But I really wasn't prepared, 18 months later, for what I saw in London, which was the finished version. And I was so captivated by it that I got on the phone, and said, "I think we should abandon the Broadway idea, and I would like to make a movie that is a fictionalised version of how Mike comes up with the idea for the live show."

The basic premise of the movie is that Salma Hayek Pinault's character offers Mike an opportunity to put on a show in London. So it's another in a series of what I would call 'process films', where, like an *Ocean's* movie, it's an exploded view of somebody trying to solve a problem. In this case, it was a really fun mash-up of things that I like – one of them being: showing people solving problems, the other being: people dancing!

When it came to staging those sequences, it was a very, very tight schedule. I was watching a lot of musicals as we were going, just to refresh my memory, and pick up ideas. But typically for some of these sequences, there was very little time, and I would have to really just operate on instinct and almost treat it like a sport. But I had all the support I needed, and all these fantastic dancers, so it wasn't stressful, it was just super-fast. I like the energy and the momentum to come from knowing you have a certain amount of time to accomplish something. You just can't think vertically all day, every day. You have to think laterally, and be creative, and be efficient: "Alright, we've got three hours from beginning to end to do this whole thing." It gets everybody on a state of high alert. And I like that part of it. There's nothing that I look back on and go, "Oh, I wish we had a lot more time to do that." We left it all on the field.

WHAT IS LOVE?

This is the first time that Mike is actually in a relationship during the movie. We've tiptoed around it in the other films. In the first one, you see him kind of beginning one. In the second one, it ended off-screen. And this is the first time we've seen him paired up with somebody in a substantial way. That was exciting to us: Where is Mike at now? He's turned 40. Things haven't really happened for him. What is a relationship to him? What does love mean to him? We have a lot of new territory here that we can explore. His partner, played by Salma, is not from the dance world. She travels in a very rarefied, sophisticated



space, and is highly intelligent, and is highly opinionated. My favourite parts of the film are watching them argue about what exactly it is that they're trying to say with this show that they're putting on, and how to say it. This is the best kind of backstage musical. I love that stuff. I think audiences do, too: seeing how the sausage is made. And there are scenes in the film where they're just arguing about what exactly they're doing, and what they're trying to do. And her saying, "Well, if that's what you're trying to do, you're not doing it." At the same time, it's loaded because they're not sure what kind of relationship they're in, personally. Everybody's watching these arguments take place, knowing that there's something going on between these two people that they're not letting on to.

We've put some really interesting dances on screen. I wanted to know, how sensual and sexy can you make a movie in which there's no actual nudity? Can we essentially return to a space where you make a movie that is really sexy, but you don't have any actual explicit sex scenes?

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

It feels like people are confused about how to deal with sex onscreen at the moment, that there's a certain amount of fear and confusion about what you can do and what's appropriate.

I feel that it will eventually find some sort of equilibrium. But to be purely erotic, has kind of dissipated. And like I said, "sexy" has been sort of viewed as purely sexual – you know, if you have explicit sex scenes, that's supposed to make something sexy. And that's never been the way that I've thought. We were trying to explore how these things are defined, and what are the philosophical and psychological aspects of attraction and sensuality that get thrown away when people want to portray sexual desire onscreen? Eight minutes into this movie, something happens that I hope people are ready for. Because you haven't seen two movie



Salma Hayek Pinault and director Steven Soderbergh deep in discussion about a scene.



The live dance scenes were filmed with a real-life crowd to enhance the strip-show feel.

stars do shit like this in... I don't know since when. We basically throw down the gauntlet, and go, "OK, you guys ready? Because this is what we're going to do."

What I think is fun about this movie is watching Channing and Salma excavating the edges of all of these questions, and trying to, in real time, find out, to discover, how should this work now? What is permission now? And how do you keep these kinds of interactions from being so prescribed that they're not sexy?

It's very tricky, but it's fascinating, especially when it comes to a form of non-verbal communication that's supposed to also

be entertaining and fun. It's about reading cues. We navigate that and stress-test a lot of the ideas that are out there about what permission means.

BOOGIE NIGHTS

We did the dance scenes with a live audience. It was so much fun to watch as the dance numbers escalate, and culminate in this thing that Channing does that's just bonkers. To see this crowd get more and more worked up, and watch and hear their reaction... that was a blast. And that's something that you can't really manufacture.

Channing was working with a dietician and a trainer, and found some algorithm... he looks better than he's ever looked in his life, and yet seems happy. He's not starving himself. He's not working out eight hours a day. They found some kind of system that seems to work. So I was happy for him, because the other two times, he and the rest of the guys were miserable. I mean, they were eating lettuce and lemon juice. It was terrible.

Channing's in his forties now but he was able to do everything that I needed him to do, over and over again, without a problem. I know he's had back issues, and you'd have to ask him, when he went home, how he felt. But I was never compromised. He never said, "I can't do another one". And the stuff he does... He has two big dances in the movie. The one he does at the end is incredibly strenuous. And he's doing it in water. It's raining. And he has to deadlift another person, spin them around, walk... It's tricky shit.

NEW MOVES

The secret of sequels is you have to be willing to make a different movie. In the case of the *Magic Mike* movies, these are three really distinct films that have completely different approaches to the story and how they're presenting the characters. What I'm happiest about with the third film is that it continues that tradition of not being anything like the first two films. And also, you don't have to have seen the first two films to get it. You can just parachute into this,

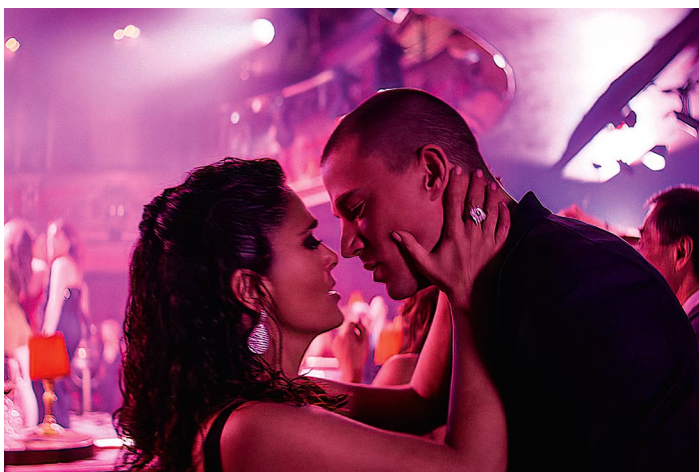
totally understand what's happening, and then go back if you so desire and watch the other two films, which could be a fun, non-linear way to experience the franchise.

There's still that thread that runs through all the *Magic Mike* movies, which I like: what people do to make a living. I like movies where people have jobs, and the issues of "How do I pay the rent?" are part of the story. So we again have that, and there are some fun discussions about that subject as well. I mean, there's a little bit of *Pygmalion* going on in the premise of this, so you can feel the class discussion running as an undercurrent. But you have to be careful to balance it – if audiences have just come to see a *Magic Mike* movie, you don't want to piss people off.

With this, we really needed to drop Mike into a place and a situation that would maximise his discomfort, and add to the degree of difficulty in achieving his goal. And so taking him to London, and placing him in a context that is not only new to him but sometimes confusing and sometimes intimidating, was really important to the story. And one of the threads running through the film was that this theatre where they're going to put this show on is one with a storied past, and there are a lot of people who are not happy about the fact that this grand old theatre is being used to put on what people assume is going to be a nudie musical.

Right now, this film feels like an end to the *Magic Mike* series. I think Channing would probably agree. I don't know where Mike would go from here. That being said, the avenues that I think have been opened up conceptually and philosophically still leave room to make a movie that exists in the *Magic Mike* universe. Like, how about a woman who lives in the suburbs, who's inspired by the movies to try and open up her own club – a dance club, a cabaret – in suburban Atlanta? What would that be like? I think there are satellite parallel universes to open up there.

MAGIC MIKE'S LAST DANCE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 FEBRUARY.



Basing the film in London offered *Magic Mike* a whole set of new challenges.

Daddy ISSUES

After his Oscar-winning dementia drama *The Father*, Florian Zeller knew exactly where to go next. A family saga that'll leave you shocked or sobbing, **THE SON** is a further deep dive into mental health. *Total Film* meets him and his stellar cast for a tear-strewn chat...

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

When Florian Zeller made his 2020 movie *The Father*, he found himself in that enviable position for a director: hot. Based on his 2012 play, *The Father*'s almost-unbearable story of dementia was nominated for six Oscars, winning two – for Zeller and co-screenwriter Christopher Hampton, and for Anthony Hopkins, devastating in the lead role. But rather than be swayed by lucrative offers, the French-born Zeller was determined to see out a long-held ambition.

"I had a plan," he says. "I didn't take the time to question what I want to do next... it was obvious that it was the film I wanted to make..." That film is *The Son*. Again inspired by one of his plays, once more the subject is

mental health. Sitting with *Total Film* in a gloomy windowless boardroom in a Mayfair hotel, the bearded, blue-eyed Zeller says, rather cryptically, it was "personal reasons" that drew him to the subject matter of depression. "It's not my story in terms of characters and situation," he says. "It's more about emotions, things that I know, things that I have experienced. I know that so many people are connected to this kind of issue." Even when the play was first produced in Paris, people queued up after performances to share their experiences on the topic.

In the film, Hugh Jackman plays Peter, a successful New York executive who, a couple of years on from his divorce to Kate (Laura Dern), has just had a baby with his new partner ➡➡



» Beth (Vanessa Kirby). But in the midst of this frenetic activity, his teenage son Nicholas (Australian newcomer Zen McGrath) is suffering from a meltdown that Peter simply doesn't have the tools to cope with. "I'm not made like other people," cries Nicholas. I'm in pain." He's been ducking out of school for a month, unable to handle what life throws at him. What comes next is a colossal struggle, as his helpless parents look to alleviate his suffering.

Coming off her own Oscar-winning turn for Noah Baumbach's *Marriage Story*, when Dern read the screenplay, it hit her – hard. "I was just devastated and moved beyond compare," she says, noting how she first encountered Zeller's script during the pandemic, just as

have complete faith and trust in the director," Jackman comments, "because what he's asking you to do is go to a place... for me, I didn't even know where I was going! I didn't know where I would end up! So you have to have incredible faith and trust. And I felt that immediately." Zeller didn't even rehearse, which surprised the actor, given both have strong theatrical backgrounds. "He just wanted us to live in the scene, trust each other and see where it goes."

Zeller began to think about Jackman for the lead after he received a letter from him. "He said, 'If you're already dancing with an actor, please forgive my letter. But I know you're working on the adaptation of *The Son*. And if you are not in conversation with anyone, I would love to have 10 minutes with you to

'I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE I WAS GOING! I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE I WOULD END UP!'

HUGH JACKMAN

articles were surfacing about "the great tragedy" of Covid-19, with enforced lockdowns leading to an increase in "depression, anxiety, and even suicide" in teenagers. "So I felt drawn to be part of the film and felt very blessed to get to be part of telling the story, because I think it's so vital. Unfortunately, tragically, more than ever."

Sporting a floral dress, Dern is seated next to a suited-and-booted Jackman when *TF* meets them during the Venice Film Festival, where *The Son* has just premiered. He may be better known for audience-pleasing turns as *Wolverine* and in *The Greatest Showman*, but Jackman's force-of-nature work in *The Son* has already put the Australian into contention for this year's Best Actor Oscar race (shockingly, he's only ever been nominated once, for his turn as the bread-stealing Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*). No question, you've never seen Jackman as raw as he is here. "I think, with a movie like this, for me, you have to

explain why I should be the one to play that part.' It doesn't happen every day, this kind of approach. I was really moved, I have to say, by his humility, his honesty, and his capacity to express his desire."

Around Jackman, Zeller sought out two women who were his acting equal: the "exceptional" Dern and British actress Kirby. Zeller had seen the latter's Oscar-nominated turn in *Pieces Of A Woman*, another crushingly tough film about parental loss. "I was impressed by her intensity," he says. "I mean, everything is always intense with her." As Kirby recently told an audience at an Academy screening, it was no picnic playing a bystander to this terrible situation who's also coping with the emotions of parenthood. "I wanted to scream sometimes, 'Guys, what are we all doing?' It very much made me appreciate how difficult it is to be a new mother."

Chiefly, though, the focus is on Peter and Kate, two divorcees forced to come back

together for the sake of their child. With Zeller's 2018 play once again co-adapted with the help of Christopher Hampton, there was one particular encounter between the two characters that left Dern floored. "I will say – if set aside alone, on the page – the scene that Hugh and I have in the restaurant is one of the most beautifully written scenes I've ever read. Because it speaks to people trying to get up and out of their own pain, and their own story, to try to figure out how to take care of this child."

Frankly, you could pinpoint any number of impeccably crafted scenes. Like when Peter



Laura Dern is on top acting form once more as the mother of the son.



Director Florian Zeller chats to lead Hugh Jackman on New York's waterfront.



Jackman, Dern and newcomer Zen McGrath as the broken family at the centre of *The Son*.



Vanessa Kirby plays Jackman's new wife who gets plunged suddenly into his old life.

visits his own father, played with chilling indifference by Anthony Hopkins. Curiously, it didn't feature in the play. Jackman calls his head-to-head moment with Hopkins "a really great addition" to the original text. "Because you spend so much of the film thinking about my character as the father. And then of course, you realise he's a son, and he hasn't dealt with the pain from that, and the ramifications, and that he's making a lot of his choices to be so consciously different from his father. Rather than maybe just being present."

It's an exchange that contains one of the most brutal lines you'll hear all year, when Hopkins' character seems fed up with Peter bemoaning his own upbringing. "Just fucking get over it," he spits. "Anthony... that's the way he approached that character," says Zeller. "He was like 'He's so right, this father!' That's why I think it was so good, because he's completely connected to what he's supposed to defend at that moment, and there's kind of truth in saying to someone, 'Stop being always a victim. You have to get over it.' Of course, he is an abusive father, he's a tyrannical father. But also, it's a different type of generation and masculinity."

Indeed, it is perhaps Peter who is the real "son" of the title – a man hamstrung by his own lack of parental love, uncertain how to soothe his own child's suffering. "I think that's ultimately what I love about this story," Jackman says, "and what I hope for myself and

maybe people seeing it is... It's OK not to know. It's OK to not be right. It's OK if you're the father or mother and you may not be the best person to help your kid. And because of his background, because of a feeling of abandonment from his father, he's determined to be the rock, be the strong one. And actually, that's the blind spot."

Of course there are scenes with doctors, psychiatrists, and hospitals, but *The Son* isn't one of those films that attempts to explore the inner workings of depression. While *The Father* put you inside the mind of a dementia sufferer, *The Son* is similarly experiential. There's a certain "mystery" to matters of the mind, says Zeller.

"It would make no sense to blame someone for suffering from a heart issue, for example. And that's the same for the brain." Jackman concurs: "Ultimately, what I think Florian does so well is take you out of any feeling of judgement about people going through it."

Close connection

Thankfully, issues like anxiety or depression are no longer such taboo topics, stigmatised in the way they once were. "Mental health – and the mental health crisis – is so universal," says Dern, "that if it's your brother, or your lover or your child, it will be a deep experience [watching this], even if you don't have children." Clearly, neither she nor Jackman escaped from this unscathed. "I have some pride about how I can always be connected to the emotion of it, but can separate the experience from the movie," she says. "And this time, I could not on any level. I felt like we were in it."

Jackman agrees, nodding to his co-star. "I relate to that completely. I guess we may have had similar sorts of introductions into acting – and what acting is – and obviously the simplest way to explain it as being as truthful as you can, in imaginary circumstances. That's the actor's job. But I was finding it harder and harder to separate. I actually was a bit in denial." His sleep was off and his emotions were volcanic. "I don't think I thought at the time, but I look back now and see that there was a real parallel to what Peter was going through."

After delivering yet another knockout blow with *The Son*, where Zeller goes next might seem obvious to even a casual observer. Surely, it's time to adapt his other famed play, *The Mother*? The story of a woman becoming unmoored in the absence of her husband, it seems fitting. "I love the idea of trilogies in general," he nods. "And it crossed my mind... but I don't know what I'll be working on. I mean, I'm still with *The Son* now. And it takes a lot of energy and space in the brain to make a film. And I'm not there yet."

THE SON OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 FEBRUARY.



SPEAKING



UP

Sarah Polley's **WOMEN TALKING** is a drama unlike any other you'll see this year. But despite its intimidating premise, which tackles systemic abuse in a closed community, it's a film of remarkable hope, and a paean to the power of conversation. Polley and her cast tell *Total Film* about the themes that speak louder than words.

WORDS MATT MAYTUM

Sarah Polley has never been a filmmaker to adhere to formula. In the former-actor's film directing career to date – *Away From Her*, *Take This Waltz*, the documentary *Stories We Tell* – there's no set style guide or subject matter that she sticks to. But there are common themes, feminist underpinnings, and, frankly, important things to say.

So while *Women Talking* is another change of pace – it's likely very different to *any* film you've seen before – it still feels very much like a Sarah Polley film. Adapted from Miriam Toews' 2018 novel of the same name (which itself was loosely inspired by real events in Bolivia in 2010), *Women Talking* concerns a group of women from a Mennonite community who have gathered in a hayloft to discuss their future. After uncovering disgraceful abuse by the colony's men (all of which occurs offscreen), this collective are considering their options against a ticking clock: said men return from the city in 24 hours.

Three generations from three families are there to thrash things out. Leave? Stay and fight? Or stay and accept their circumstances as they are. Presented in a desaturated, not-quite-black-and-white palette, *Women Talking* foregrounds these intense conversations, and lets them run at length, in powerful detail. And there's an incredible assortment of actors tackling the dialogue and interrogating the various options. Among the key cast are Rooney Mara, as Ona, who is pregnant; Claire Foy as the fiercely pro stay-and-fight Salome; Jessie Buckley as Mariche, who fears what might happen if they stay. Frances McDormand (who also produces) features in a pivotal supporting role. Amid the women is August (Ben Whishaw), a teacher (this community only allows him to educate the males). August takes the minutes of the meeting, and barely conceals his love for Ona.

There's a lot to say and a lot to unpack when *Total Film* meets Polley at the London Film Festival in October 2022. Also present is Foy, and we later catch up with Buckley, Mara and Whishaw. Everyone involved is clear that the film speaks to problems – and solutions – that go far beyond the very specific milieu of the film's setting. "It's funny, as we roll out the film, I just want to shout from the rooftops: the background of the story is not what the film's about," smiles Polley, cosy and relaxed in a black shawl and thick black spectacles. "It's about something much more dynamic and challenging and ultimately hopeful, I think."

ORIGIN STORY

SARAH POLLEY [WRITER/DIRECTOR]: I had read [Miriam Toews' novel] on my own, and I had loved it. I imagined it as a film. Within days, I saw on my Twitter feed that Dede Gardner and Frances McDormand had the rights to it. I reached out to Frank Frattoroli, who's my manager and also Fran's manager, who'd introduced me to Frances over the years. I just said: "Do they have a writer/director on this yet?" He had had an email from Frances and Dede, I think the same day, asking about my availability, so it felt very meant-to-be.

CLAIRE FOY [SALOME]: This film would not have been made 10 years ago. Dede Gardner is a firebrand. I just want to shout her name from the rooftops. In *Telluride*, someone stopped her, and said: "Dede Gardner, thank you for cinema." That is the significance of who she is: the films she makes, the directors and writers she champions, the actors that she allows in her projects. I've never seen a producer like her either. Her and Fran and Sarah together: I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall in those conversations. I would have been so out of my depth.



Where's all the straw?
One of the film's rare
outside scenes.



Director Sarah
Polley talks
through a scene.



Rooney Mara and
Claire Foy with young
star Emily Mitchell.

ROONEY MARA [ONA]: I had read the book and loved it, and I reached out to Sarah, begging her to meet me.

JESSIE BUCKLEY [MARICHE]: [Watching Polley's 2012 documentary *Stories We Tell*] kind of made it very clear to me that she was going to be able to explore and experience the questions that *Women Talking* was going to be bringing up, and to allow all the voices to be heard, and to have conflict and challenge and opposing ideas and beliefs and fears and hopes – and I guess an unknowability within all that as well.

SARAH POLLEY: [Someone in my book club] told me the background of the true story that this was about, and I was like: "There's no chance I'm making this into a film." She responded, "But I knew you were going to say that. The film is actually this incredible conversation that happens between these women. They're talking about these three options of whether to stay and fight; whether to leave; whether to stay and do nothing. And to decide the fate of their community in this 24-hour period while the men are away." I was kind of hooked from that. So I was actually reading it, thinking about [adapting it], because she had suggested it. But it's funny, at every stage, this is the challenge of the movie: the background of the story is not what the film is about.

MARA: When I read the book, I was like,



Despite all the tense scenes, Mara and Foy say that it was a fun set to work on.

“Well, this is impossible.” But I didn’t really care. The truth is, I didn’t really care how the film turned out. If it was terrible, I wouldn’t have cared. I wanted to work with Sarah – period – and I wanted to have the experience of having this conversation with women in a hayloft. That’s really all I cared about.

FLIP THE SCRIPT

FOY: [*The screenplay*] was like nothing else I’d ever read. It didn’t read like a play. It’s hard to put into words what it read like. I’d never read anything where people were talking in that way to each other. I’d never read anything that’s so robust. It was a film where people were having really, really big conversations about really big things – at length, at times. Which I’d never really read before. I said to Sarah, “How are you going to do this?”

BEN WHISHAW [AUGUST]: To be honest, I sort of knew even before I read it that I would really like to work with those people. And then I was just really very taken with it as a piece, and very moved by it. It was a really emotionally affecting thing to read. To put a discussion at the centre of a film, a debate... that did feel unusual. And particularly because it’s philosophical. Yes, it’s emotional and dynamic, but it’s also philosophical and spiritual. And it goes into so many dimensions that most things tend to veer away from. I could see that this isn’t easy, but

I really liked it. And I thought it was such an unusual, beautiful way to tackle an issue – this issue of abuse, really.

FOY: [*Polley*] was just meeting lots of people, and asking them who they felt close to. I was so glad when she said to me: “Who do you identify with most?” and I was like: “Salome, but I bet everyone says that.” And she was like, “No, they really don’t.” She was the one that terrified me, as an actor. I think she was a very good wife and a very good mother. But I think with the women, she was like, “There’s no time for this shit. Come on. This is big shit. We’ve got to do it now.” She’s not afraid to dive in. She knows that the women are able to take it.

BUCKLEY: I mean, [*my character Mariche is*] not necessarily somebody I would align myself beside. There’s parts of her that I recognise, and I definitely recognise all of the women in all of my life, and in myself. But I guess she kind of was such a hard nut to hold and crack. I was very interested to sit on that side of the field, and see what that might teach me. I don’t know. I don’t really know why you’re drawn to certain things. Even within the book, I really just felt a kind of... I felt for her. I felt smacked by her. She annoyed me as well [*laughs*].

MARA: Ona was the one that I was most drawn to, which I told Sarah in our first meeting. She’s sort of an outcast in the community. She’s more educated than the other women. She’s gone to a secret school with August’s mother, growing up. ➡

IN CONVERSATION

➤ So she's more educated. She's not married, which is very unusual for a woman her age in the community. Being the dreamer of the group, I think these conversations are really exhilarating for her.

BUCKLEY: I guess the thing I realised when I was shooting [Mariche] is, there's a lot of internal violence in her... It has to almost be broken apart. In some ways, there was a part of her that's "better the devil you know". She's been able to survive whatever in this life, in the hope that in the next life, it will be a bit better.

WHISHAW: [August is] one of those people that's kind of always lonely, in a sense. But really a kind person, trying, despite his own fragility and his own frailty and his own limitations, to do something good. I don't even know if he'd see it that way. It's just to be there. This is what I felt when I read it, and what I think August thinks himself of being in it – it's not about him. But he has a very specific role to play, which is to listen and to record this discussion. And that's something that he can do.

POLLEY: The really complicated thing about casting this film is that we couldn't cast one person until we cast everybody, because they function as an organism. It's about a community, and they're so interdependent and intertwined. And we're also creating a community of actors like a company, really, that was going to be able to hold space for each other in this hayloft for months and months.

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

MARA: It was probably one of the best experiences I've ever had. Also, I was a new mom, and my son was there with me. I was falling more in love with him every day. Because of where I was in my life, on top of having this idyllic experience in this hayloft with these women, it was just all very... I don't know how to describe it. But there were days when it was draining. We were doing 10-page scenes at a time, and breaking it up into chunks. We would do them 100 times through. We would do them for days at a time. So it was exhausting. But it also felt pretty magical.

BUCKLEY: It was intense! [laughs] It was an incredible bunch. Sarah really thought about who she put together in that room. It was a mad time. It was strict Covid [rules] in Canada at the time. So there was an intensity on set at the time because of that, and we were fleshing out these questions that we didn't have answers for. Sometimes that was really hard, but I think because of the team that Sarah had put together, we were able to hold all of that for each other. We were able to laugh. There was a lot of laughter on set, and a lot of mischief on set, which was such a relief.

WHISHAW: This did feel like a company. We became close. But there was also lots of laughter. Mainly laughter. Mainly joking around, and being silly, and gossiping. We didn't talk about "the stuff" much, because you can't stay there for nine weeks. You know what I mean?

POLLEY: Ben was amazing. Ben just created this incredibly thoughtful, calm container for everybody. He's very funny, but he also just doesn't take up very much space, and was just a joy in every minute to be around. It's hard to imagine who else could have played that part who wouldn't have somehow disrupted the dynamic. But he just added so much.

MARA: That was maybe Sarah's most brilliant stroke of casting. It might have really changed the dynamic between all of us if it had been someone else. We should have made him sign an NDA, because some of the things we talked about out there as women – no man should have had ears on that conversation. But he was so beautiful. We all were in love with him.



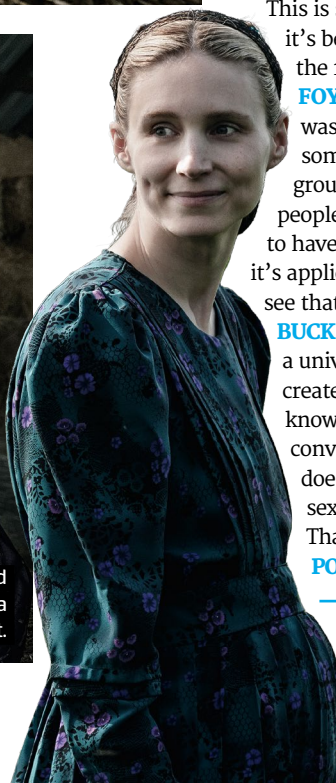
The stellar, mostly female cast feels like a theatre company.



Ben Whishaw plays August, the only male at the meeting.



Judith Ivey and Claire Foy having a tender moment.



FOY: We had some really gnarly conversations [*on set*]. Like, really deep. And then you realise you're speaking about incredibly personal things whilst you're mic'd. There were times when we were like, "Oh my God, we need to rein it in." But we knew that we were in a safe space.

TALKING POINTS

POLLEY: With the violence, I didn't see what the purpose would be [*of depicting it on screen*]. I think what's important is the impact it's had on all these women, and how they process it, and how they're moving through it and alongside it. Not the actual specificity of the act, which didn't seem to be additive in any way.

FOY: Sometimes, I think, in film it can be fetishised, and it becomes the main event. The main event is how it impacts upon the person who's just had the assault, and where their life goes from there. Which everyone seems to forget about, or finds less interesting. Which is incredibly bizarre.

POLLEY: And then in terms of not using the word 'Mennonite'... We were very, very true to the details of the Mennonite colony. We were very, very true to the dresses and the props and the sets. But there's a sense in which I didn't really want people to be able to look at this horrific story, and think about it in the context of what happens in this kind of isolated community that we don't understand much about anyway. It'd be very easy to create distance between us and those issues. When in fact, this is about all of us, and it is a fable. Especially as someone who's not Mennonite, I didn't feel comfortable... also based on the fact that most of my experiences with the Mennonite community have been extremely positive. I have a lot of admiration for a lot of things about their society, and their collectivity, and their sense of community.

MARA: The conversation was so much broader. It could have been about any group of women anywhere. There are women in every screening who are affected deeply by it, who can relate to it. And none of them are Mennonite.

WHISHAW: I think it's speaking to very big themes that exist in the world everywhere, without question. It's also about a religious community. There's no getting away from that. So it has a foot in both camps, I think. But hopefully the more specific you are, the more universal it can kind of become.

BUCKLEY: The thing with this conversation is, it's never finite. This is something that's been going on forever. You know, it's been going on, whether it was bloody witch-hunts in the 1700s. It's not a new conversation.

FOY: It's obviously called *Women Talking*, but that was basically as far as it went. [*Polley*] wanted it to be something that could be applicable to every repressed group of people around the world, or any group of people who need to work together in a democratic way to have a conversation and make something change. I think it's applicable to all those things that people are willing to see that it is.

BUCKLEY: It's a story for men and women. There's a universal education that we've learned. It's up to us to create a new place for us to go. And where that is, we don't know. But we have to be brave enough to at least have a conversation about it. It's a timeless conversation. This doesn't belong to one person or one gender or one sexuality or one colony. It belongs to whoever wants it. That's what I think.

POLLEY: I think it's about all of us.

WOMEN TALKING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 FEBRUARY.

A close-up, high-contrast portrait of a woman's face, tilted slightly to the left. Her eyes are looking down and to the left, with a somber expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of her skin and the contours of her face. The background is dark and out of focus.

WEB OF



LIES

Inspired by the true story of an Iranian serial killer on a religious crusade, *Holy Spider* has seen its director Ali Abbasi and his Cannes-winning lead vilified in their native country. *Total Film* meets them to discuss one of the year's most crucial and contentious movies.

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

In 2001, an Iranian construction worker, Saeed Hanaei, was arrested for murdering 16 sex workers in the northeastern city of Mashhad. Luring them into his home, strangling them with a scarf and then dumping the bodies in roads or open sewers, the press dubbed him the “spider killer”.

At his trial, before he was sentenced to be hanged, he claimed he was cleansing the city of moral corruption, even believing he had received divine approval. “I realised God looked favourably on me,” he stated. “That he had taken notice of my work.”

Rather than dismiss this as the ramblings of a psychopath, some religious hardliners celebrated his actions. “Who is to be judged?” wrote the conservative newspaper *Jomhuri Islami*. “Those who look to eradicate the sickness or those who stand at the root of the corruption?” Hanaei became something of a folk hero for extremists, and the subject of endless fascination. With the help of journalist Roya Karimi, Maziar Bahari’s 52-minute documentary *And Along Came A Spider* ploughed through the case back in 2002.

It was these planted seeds that intrigued Ali Abbasi, the Iranian-born (and Denmark-based) filmmaker, who previously garnered attention for his 2018 modern-day fantasy-fable *Border*. His new movie *Holy Spider* fictionalises the case, without glorifying Hanaei’s crimes. “I didn’t want to give people too much of a subjective ride with a cool serial killer guy from the shadows,” he explains over coffee. “I wanted to be concrete. I wanted to be a bit surgical, and I wanted to be in-your-face.”

Starring Mehdi Bajestani as Saeed, a seemingly respectable married father, the film also features Zar Amir-Ebrahimi as Rahimi, a Tehran-based journalist who is on the hunt for the killer. Playing like a film noir, the film skates close to David Fincher’s *Zodiac*, which dealt with the search for the murderer who stalked Northern California in the late 1960s. Abbasi wanted to address the “perverse aspect” of most true-crime dramas, where you can gleefully watch a psychopath dismembering bodies “from the comfort of your home” and still feel morally righteous.

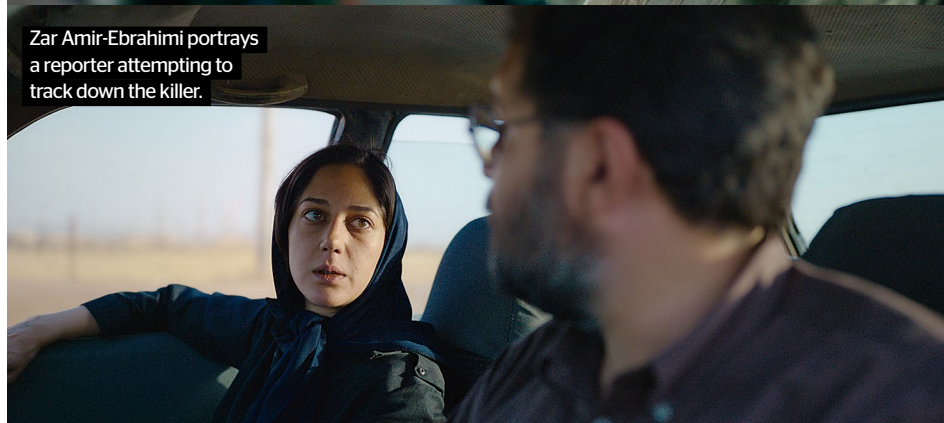
“I wanted to turn this on its head and say, ‘The shocking thing is, this guy could be me. This guy could be you.’ This guy is not some real weirdo that wants to have a cocoon and be a butterfly. This is a guy who has three kids, has loan payments and whatnot coming up. And I think the real mystery for me was how normal he was and how he could operate in that normalcy. That’s also why it made sense to not make him a shadowy figure and put him in dark for long as they usually do [in serial killer movies].”

In the film, Amir-Ebrahimi’s reporter teams up with local journalist Sharifi (Arash Ashtiani) to uncover the killer’s identity, a mission that gets deadlier by the day. The actress’ character is a composite and “fictionalised”, she says, but in the course of her research, Amir-Ebrahimi paid attention to the stories of sexual abuse and harassment that led to the formation of the MeToo movement. “That was really interesting for me. And I started to call my friends, especially those journalists who were working at that time in Iran, and they told me their sad stories.”

Indeed, *Holy Spider* is far more than a procedural. In one scene, Rahimi fends off advances from a police captain, the inference being that misogyny and female oppression is ingrained in Iranian society. “This whole case bites them in places that you didn’t know existed,” says Abbasi. “I think it bothers them on a very fundamental level, which is not about being system critical or regime critical. We see



Zar Amir-Ebrahimi portrays a reporter attempting to track down the killer.



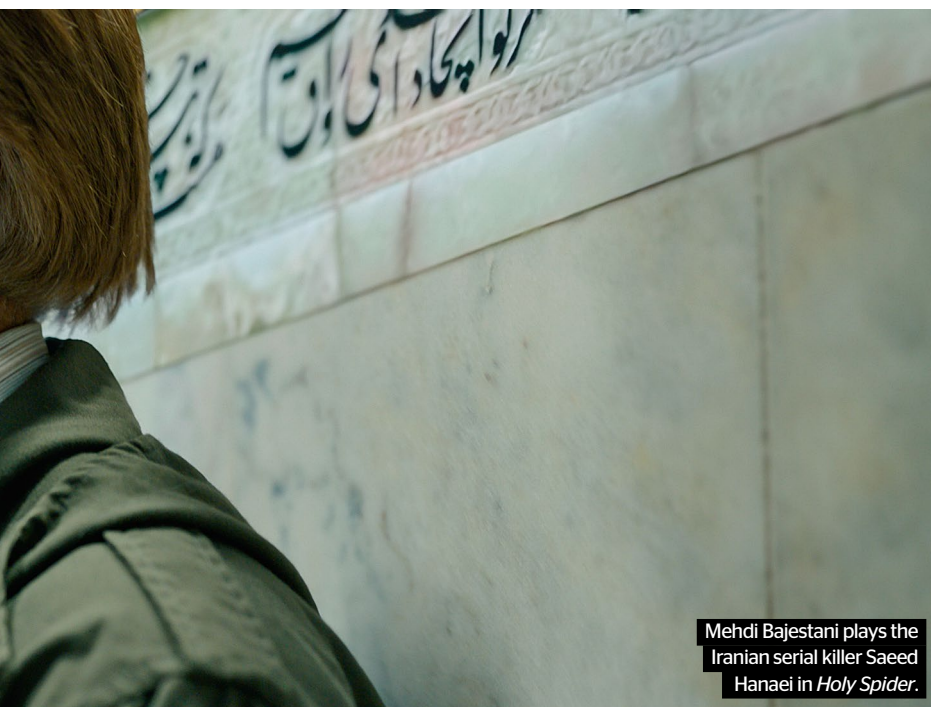
– or demonstrate – part of this unconscious stream of Islamic Republic, which is Islam, or the politicised version of Islam, meeting suppressed sexuality. And I think that is a fuel that this guy was also on.”

Yet much like the case itself, which forced Iranian authorities to admit to the issue of prostitution, *Holy Spider* has landed like a bomb. The moment it bowed in competition at the Cannes Film Festival last May it caused a stink back in Iran. Condemned by the censorship-heavy Iranian government, the film became a hotly debated topic, based on just a 40-second teaser trailer and reviews out of Cannes (*The Hollywood Reporter* called the film “a critique of his [Abbasi’s] homeland’s punishing theocratic system, where women seem to always be guilty of something, even when they’re the victims of cold-blooded murder”).

Abbasi found the “outrage” slightly comical, given nobody had seen the film in Iran. “They were like, ‘Oh, you’re insulting the Imam,’” he says, noting that the film’s shot of Imam Reza, a major shrine in Mashhad, led people to speculate that he was blasphemously comparing the building to a spider’s web, and therefore the Spider Killer. “I was like, ‘Yeah, you forgot the dick pics! And you forgot the sex scene... I mean, the list of the taboos that were broken [in the film] is much bigger than you think!’”

More concerning, he and Amir-Ebrahimi – and the film – immediately became targets. “They even





Mehdi Bajestani plays the Iranian serial killer Saeed Hanaei in *Holy Spider*.



The reporters find to their surprise that the killer has his supporters among traditionalists.

went as far as having chatbots dragging down our IMDb score,” says Abbasi. “It’s insane. They had caricatures of me and Zar in the main streets of Tehran. I mean, that sounds really outrageous. But they did. Like having us [seen as] traitors and doing anything to get [an] Oscar and whatnot. On one hand, I’m like, ‘Are these guys out of their fucking mind?’ If I didn’t like a movie or a book, my way of doing it wouldn’t be like, ‘Don’t see it, don’t watch it!’ And on the other hand, I’m like, ‘Yeah, of course!’ Because these guys are dumb!’” Amir-Ebrahimi, who won Best Actress in Cannes for her performance, was anything but celebrated back home. The caricatures? “They were like big billboards with our faces,” she sighs. Although it’s hardly the first time her name has been besmirched. Living in France these past 15 years, the actress had to leave Iran to avoid punishment (a prison sentence and 99 lashes) after an intimate tape of her leaked online. “I’m not allowed to work anymore in Iranian cinema – and they’re not allowed to show my face anywhere,” she says.

While Abbasi had initially wanted to shoot in Mashhad, a friend advised him against it. “He was like, ‘Yeah, you would go there, you would enter, but would you exit?’” At the time, it felt like ‘Am I being too paranoid?’ But then when the movie actually came out, and they were so outraged, I was like, ‘OK, so maybe it wasn’t actually far-fetched.’” Instead, Abbasi’s team shot in Amman, Jordan,

recreating the film’s central location, conjured with noir-ish overtones. “Mashhad in this movie is not much more real than L.A. in *Chinatown*,” he says.

Amir-Ebrahimi felt this immediately freed up the production. “I’m so happy that it happened in this way. Because [if he had shot in Iran] he couldn’t shoot this movie in this way. He’d have to listen to them... to censor his script. And now he did it in total freedom. We were all free to do everything. Have you ever seen a movie from Iran, with women without a hijab? Have you ever seen a movie [from Iran] with a sex scene? No. But this is the reality. It is happening. Women are not sleeping in bed with scarves!”

Despite contravening so many Iranian taboos – even showing drug taking, with sex workers hooked on dope – Abbasi is bullish. “You know what? I don’t fucking care. It also frustrates me with other Iranian filmmakers and Iranian movies. There’s always this fucking give and take with Iranian censorship. It’s like, ‘Oh, I don’t like it. But I do it.’ It pissed me off when [late Iranian director Abbas] Kiarostami was saying that censorship was... he was using it as a creative tool. I was like, ‘You’re so full of shit.’ And he was a great filmmaker, a great artist. But it’s so against my temperament.”

When *Total Film* meets both Abbasi and Amir-Ebrahimi, during last October’s London Film Festival, it’s the day after *Holy Spider*’s British premiere. The reaction – as in other countries outside of Iran – has been overwhelmingly positive. “Honestly, I’m shocked,” says Abbasi. “Because it’s a harsh movie, it’s very explicit... I didn’t count on a 70-year-old

‘They even went as far as having chatbots dragging down our IMDb score’

ALI ABBASI

lady, last night, coming to me and saying how proud she is. I really didn’t count on that.” The frank language and explicit scenes, rather than shock, were welcomed by audiences. “They are like, ‘Wow, finally!’” adds Amir-Ebrahimi.

Since *Holy Spider* arrived in Cannes, the situation in Iran has progressively worsened. In September, country-wide demonstrations took place in reaction to the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman who was being held at the time by the Guidance Patrol – also known as the Morality Police – for wearing an “improper” hijab. Later, the Iranian Attorney General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri announced that the Guidance Patrol, which is used to enforce the Islamic Republic’s laws concerning personal behaviour and dress codes, was to be suspended.

While these events have clearly overtaken *Holy Spider* in the public discourse, it feels like it’s become part of the wider conversation. Even Amir-Ebrahimi’s award, Abbasi feels, was symbolic. When the jury were deliberating in Cannes, he felt awarding his actress made a statement. “I thought, ‘If these people want to send a message, that is true to the movie, that is true to how the situation is in Iran and in the Middle East, this would be the time’, and I’m really happy that they did.”

Could the film ever be shown in Iran? “We’ll find a way,” says Abbasi, confidently. “I don’t anticipate a red-carpet event! But we’ll find a way because I think it’s important, especially in the climate now. I think it’s important.”

HOLY SPIDER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 20 JANUARY, AND STREAMS ON MUBI FROM 10 MARCH.

INTERVIEW MATT MAYTUM

‘I’D RATHER BE
MAKING MY MISTAKE
THAN SOMEBODY
ELSE’S MISTAKE.’

KUMAIL NANJIANI

He’s the stand-up comedian and sitcom star who – in the span of a few years – has become an Oscar-nominated writer, a chiselled Marvel superhero and a prolific producer.

Now, Kumail Nanjani is tackling his darkest role yet in a miniseries about the rise of the male-stripping troupe, Chippendales (yes, really).

PORTRAITS MARIAH TAUGER

MARIAH TAUGER/CONTOUR BY GETTY



I

'm sorry, I have some cereal," smiles Kumail Nanjiani. "I have mistimed my morning." It's November 2022, and Nanjiani is speaking to *Total Film* between spoonfuls of breakfast. Dressed in a plain grey t-shirt, and sporting a short stubbly beard, he's relaxed and open when talking about his latest project and the career path that's led him here.

A self-confessed nerd (a couple of boxed Funko Pop! vinyls sit on his shelves), 44-year-old Nanjiani was born in Pakistan, before moving to Iowa aged 18. Starting out as a stand-up comic and podcaster (regularly chatting videogames and *The X-Files*), he began to get little TV roles here and there, until his big TV break arrived in the form of Mike Judge's *Silicon Valley*; he played needy Dinesh over six seasons of the HBO show, from 2014.

He says there's been "no game plan at all" for his career. "It's all just been about the very next thing. And so the goals sort of evolve as you evolve." A turning point came when Judd Apatow encouraged him

to write a movie based on a pivotal point in his life, when his then-girlfriend and now-wife Emily V. Gordon became ill and fell into a coma early on in their relationship. Nanjiani and Gordon co-wrote the semi-autobiographical script (bagging an Oscar nomination), and Nanjiani also starred, alongside Zoe Kazan as Emily. "It's kind of great," says Nanjiani of the co-writing process, "because even the first draft of the script is kind of the third draft, because we've been rewriting each other's work as we've been going along."

The success of *The Big Sick* led to tons more work for Nanjiani, including comedy leads (*Stuber*, *The Lovebirds*) and bit parts that shone in so-so blockbusters (*Men In Black: International*, *Dolittle*). Alongside Gordon, he also produced Apple TV+ anthology series *Little America*, a drama that shines a light on immigrant stories, and recently he hit geek pay dirt landing roles in both the Marvel and *Star Wars* universes: as immortal Bollywood star Kingo in *Eternals*, and faux Jedi Haja Estree in Disney+ miniseries *Obi-Wan Kenobi*.

The jumping-off point for our chat today is his most serious dramatic role yet. In *Welcome To Chippendales*, which he also produces, Nanjiani stars as Somen 'Steve' Banerjee, founder of male-stripping phenomenon the Chippendales. "I saw a picture of him, with the Chippendales dancers, and it's this sort of podgy, nerdy, brown guy, surrounded by these white Adonises," says Nanjiani of Banerjee. "And it just felt like he did not fit that world at all."

It's quite the transformation for Nanjiani, who gained weight for the role (having got superhero buff for *Eternals*):

it's a role of precise physicality, and tightly coiled rage. "He doesn't fit into this world that he's the boss of. Everyone else likes themselves. They're so comfortable with their body. I wanted him to be the opposite of that. He's stiff. He's not in touch with anything below his neck."

A couple of details from the true story have been redacted from the interview, to give you the chance to view it unspoiled. But Nanjiani has plenty to say about his career to date. After one more spoonful of cereal.

You were offered *Welcome To Chippendales* years back as a film, and said no. Now it's a TV series: what changed for you over the years?

I got offered it in 2017, right after *The Big Sick* came out, and my head was spinning a little bit at the time. It was the first time I was getting opportunities to do stuff that I hadn't before. And I thought that I didn't want to move away from comedy. I'm a comedian. I love the idea of finally getting to be funny in movies, and not just be a guy who comes in, in one scene, and just leaves. So I was like, "I want to stay in comedy."

And I also thought that the script was so dark, and the character was so dark. I was a little intimidated. I didn't quite know how to find a way into playing someone like this.

Did you just feel more able to approach that kind of character, or was it the expansion into a TV series?

I think it was really more the former, and a little bit the latter. I was happy that it was a miniseries, because there was so much that could be expanded on. But since then, I've spent four or five years mostly doing a lot of comedy. Or even when it wasn't comedy, I was sort of being funny in it. Some of those turned out well, and some of them did not turn out well.

And I realised, after doing it for a few years, that I *did* want to try something different. I think of someone like Robin Williams, who was always doing comedy, and he pivoted to doing a lot of serious stuff – really heavy stuff – while still being funny in other stuff.


So I thought, "I owe it to myself to at least try that." So I basically said yes, not knowing how I would approach it, but just trusting myself to be able to figure it out.

Were you familiar with the true story?

No. The first time I heard of it was when it first came to me, back in 2017. I had no idea that the character, the guy who started Chippendales, was an immigrant from India. I had no idea that there was all this violence behind the scenes, and all this



With co-stars Holly Hunter and Ray Romano in breakout hit film *The Big Sick*.



Nanjani gained weight to play the shadowy figure of Chippendales founder Somen 'Steve' Banerjee.

rampant criminality. I had no idea. I was just really, really surprised by all of it.

Because to me, Chippendales is such a specifically American thing: the flair, the drama, the entertainment. It feels so specifically American to me, in that it's really over the top. So the idea that it wasn't an American who came up with it was surprising to me.

So when you came on board with this, was there a lot of material on Steve that you could dig into?

Actually, no. He wasn't comfortable on camera. The episode where he does the interview, that's based on one of the very little bits of footage that we have of him.

There's a less-than-30-second clip of him doing a practice interview. You just see how terrible he is at it, how awkward he is. He's talking about the things that are interesting to him, which is the bottom line and profit margins and all that. There's one tiny, little clip of him doing a photo shoot, and he's very stressed out and trying to hide it.

And then we know the things he did. And we know what other people said about

him. But what's interesting about what other people said is that people had wildly different experiences of him. Some people loved him, some people hated him...

And so that's all the pieces of research that I had. We know that money was very, very important to him, that a certain kind of success was very important to him. But beyond that, my job was to sort of interpret the character as written in the script. Which is how I would approach any character in any script. It's all you have to go on.

'I SAID YES, TRUSTING MYSELF TO BE ABLE TO FIGURE IT OUT'

You gained some weight for this. How did that compare to your experience of getting super-fit?

I wanted to look different from the dancers around me.

There was a time in my life where I didn't look that different from the dancers around me. They set me up with a bunch of nutritionists, and I talked to them about how to gain weight in a healthy way. None of them seemed very fun. And so I was like, "I know how to do this. I know how to gain weight." That's not the hard part.

And so I just ate. I ate everything I could. I started off having one sort of heavy meal

a day, then two, then three. By the end, I was having four heavy meals a day. It was just about not restricting myself in any way. It did get to the point where I was sort of forcing myself to eat the stuff, because I'm naturally not meant to weigh that. And because I did it in an unhealthy way, there were sort of health drawbacks from it. But I did know that it was only going to be for a few months, and then I could go back to not eating like a woodchipper all the time.

You're a producer here as well. What does that side of the job entail?

I loved being a producer, because I see so many things I've been in that I've watched, and I'm like, "Why did they make that decision?" Again, not that I know any better, but at least... You know, I'd rather be making my mistake than somebody else's mistake.

So it was great. I was involved with the casting from the beginning. I was involved with getting the writers, with getting all the directors. And most importantly, to me, being involved in the editing stage. I really, really loved that part of it. I've seen things that I've done, where I've watched it, and said, "I know there's a better movie in the footage. We just

➤ didn't find it in the edit." That's happened multiple times. So it was good to be involved with all of that.

As an actor, it's largely out of your hands when it comes to which takes are used.

Yeah, for sure. It makes all the difference, especially with comedy. Editing is everything. Because the other advantage that I have in an edit is, as an actor in the scene, I know what shooting the scene felt like. I know what feeling I was getting from the other performer. And if I see an edit of a scene that doesn't have that feeling, I know: "OK, it felt like this to shoot it, and it's not coming across in the scene." So it's a really, really valuable part of it. It's absolutely essential. I mean, again, it's been heartbreaking to watch some stuff I've been in, and know it didn't quite come out the way I wanted it.

Does dramatic acting feel very different from comedic acting?

It's different. There are obvious similarities. I think the preparation process is the same. I think that figuring out a character is the same. I think that this character was a bit tougher to figure out just because he's more complicated.

But the biggest adjustment was: with comedy, it's so much about the rhythm and the timing. It's so much about pace. And drama acting is not so much about rhythm, timing or pace. So the biggest adjustment was learning to take the time when I needed to, to give myself that space to get to a line, and really sitting in the silences, if that's what the moment called for.

I think that was sort of the best piece of direction I've ever gotten, when a director was like, "Take your time with this line." That gives me permission to really feel it, rather than just do it. Whereas in comedy, I feel like if you're doing a version of a line, there is a best version of that line.

You've talked about dramatic acting being daunting, but stand-up comedy must be one of the most daunting performing arts. What was the appeal?

Well, initially, I always thought of myself as a writer, and the only way I could get my writing out there was stand-up. So, really, performing on stage was sort of a necessary evil. It made me very, very nervous, and I really hated doing it.

And then I would get really, really nervous to get up and get on stage. I was lucky in that my first few sets were all really strong. So I loved the feeling of perhaps thinking that I could be good at something that I also loved. And I loved the feeling of doing well on stage.



FIVE STAR TURNS

SILICON VALLEY 2014-2019

"A sitcom is about stasis," says Nanjiani of his six-season run as programmer Dinesh in Mike Judge's HBO hit set at a tech start-up. "It's about the same people stuck in the same thing. That's what makes it funny."

THE BIG SICK 2017

Oscar-nominated as screenwriters, Nanjiani and wife Emily V. Gordon mined their own history for this romantic dramedy about a fledgling relationship challenged by illness. Nanjiani also proved his chops as a lead.

LITTLE AMERICA 2020-

Nanjiani and Gordon exec produce the Apple TV+ show, the second season of which dropped in December 2022. "You hear a lot of pitches, but rarely do you hear one that's such a no-brainer," he says.

ETERNALS 2021

A key member of Chloé Zhao's era-spanning ensemble, Nanjiani plays immortal hero and Bollywood star Kingo. "I'd been very vocal about my love of the MCU, so they knew I was a massive fan of all this stuff," he beams.

OBI-WAN KENOBI 2022

Bringing levity to an often serious *Star Wars* spin-off show, Nanjiani stole scenes as con artist Haja Estree. "It's more intimidating to walk into something that's so established, and has been for decades," he says. **MM**



APPLE, DISNEY, LUCASFILM, MARVEL STUDIOS, HBO, LONGGATE

But it was still extremely nerve-racking. Every single time, it was a challenge. It took me about five or six years of performing all the time [until] I finally started enjoying my time on stage.

Was it helpful when it came to acting?

What helped was, in stand-up, when you're at your best, you're really, really in the moment. You're not thinking about what you said, or what you're going to say. You're really there, reacting to the audience and truly, truly being in the now, which is a hard thing to achieve off-stage for a lot of people, including me. So I think that sense memory of truly being there, and listening to the crowd, and reacting to them, is the thing that's most important in acting.

When your acting ambitions were developing, did you feel like you'd hit the jackpot when you landed a series regular gig on *Silicon Valley*?

Oh, yeah. Of course. I wanted that job so bad! Mike Judge! *Beavis And Butt-Head* sort of changed my life. I'd never seen characters like that. I'd never seen comedy like that. *Office Space* blew me away. I've seen that movie so many times. *Idiocracy*. I'm a huge fan of Mike Judge. I just got a call saying, "He's doing a new HBO show. Would you go in and audition?"

I said, "Yes, of course [laughs]. Sure, I'll audition for Mike Judge."

I did the audition, and it went great. And I was like, "OK. Well, at least I got to meet Mike Judge." And then when they called me to tell me that I was going to be in the show, I could not think of a better situation. I was over the moon at getting to do a comedy on HBO with Mike Judge. I mean, it doesn't get any better than that. I still can't believe I got to do that.

How was it for you working on something – and one character – for such a long period of time?

It was interesting. We did six seasons, and by the end, we all felt like it was time to move on. We still loved the show, and still loved doing it. But I felt later that my character was still bound by the acting abilities I had in Season 1. And so I felt like I'd been learning so much doing other jobs, like *The Big Sick*, that I wasn't really able to apply, because the character had been defined back then.

So towards the end, it was really, really fun, but I was just a little frustrated, because I wanted to be able to do different kinds of things, and this character, who

I loved, it just wasn't in his character to do some of these things. I'm glad we didn't keep going until it got stale, that the show was good right until the end. And then when it was done, I was like, "OK, I don't want to do TV for a long time. Six years to do one thing because of a character is a lot." And now I really miss it.

You mentioned *The Big Sick*. Was Judd Apatow the driving force behind getting you and Emily to mine this life experience and turn it into a screenplay?

Definitely. I met Judd Apatow at a festival here called SXSW, and we were on the same show. I'd done a little blink-and-you-miss-it – a tiny, tiny part – in a movie he had produced called *The Five-Year Engagement*. It's very, very small. Like, truly nothing. I think I was on set for a total of 10 minutes.

But Judd was very kind when he met me. I hadn't seen the movie. He was like, "You're really, really funny in it. You get a laugh exactly when the movie needs it."

I was like, "Wow."

And then I watched it, and I was like, "What is he talking about?"

I'm not in this movie.

I literally am standing there laughing for truly three seconds."

But we met on this show, and we sort of hung out that weekend, and he had me come in, and said, you know, "Do you have any ideas

for stuff you want to do?"

And I said I had a bunch of crazy, wacky ideas. And then I said, "And my girlfriend was in a coma when I met her parents." And he said, "That's the story. That's what you should do."

It took three years to get to the point where we could make it, and Judd just kept pushing us to make the story more personal and more emotional and deeper and deeper. He really taught me and Emily how to write, and how to turn something you've lived through into a story that other people might be interested in.

He was definitely the impetus for it. If it wasn't for Judd, we wouldn't have made that movie. Judd was the one who kept believing in us, and telling us to keep going.

Did the Oscar nomination you and Emily received for that open up a lot of meetings and change the kind of things that were coming your way?

Yeah. I think just *The Big Sick* coming out did that. Certainly there was, you know, a new person to be in a comedy. I got sent scripts from the last 20 years that had ➡➡

**"I WAS LIKE,
"WELL, AT
LEAST I GOT TO
MEET MIKE
JUDGE"**

KUMAIL NANJIANI IN NUMBERS

53

Episodes of *Silicon Valley* Nanjiani appears in.

1994

THE YEAR HIS
HUGH GRANT
STANDOM
BEGAN.

3_M

Followers on
Twitter.

\$402_M

THE BOX-OFFICE
TAKE OF NANJIANI'S
HIGHEST-GROSSING
FILM TO DATE,
ETERNALS.

25_{lbs}

Nanjiani put on to portray
Somen 'Steve' Banerjee in
*Welcome To
Chippendales*.



➤ never gotten made, and I could see that at one point this was for Jim Carrey, and then it was for Will Ferrell, and then it was for Paul Rudd, and then it was for Jason Sudeikis. You could sort of see the evolution of the script over the years, as each of those people had become someone who could be in a comedy, you know?

It sort of really, really changed things. *The Big Sick* and the Oscar nomination really, really changed things. Emily is now a full-time screenwriter, and she does stuff on her own. We do stuff together but she does a lot of work on her own. So it changed a lot of stuff for her. She's always got multiple projects that she's juggling.

And for me, it really opened up things on the acting side. Even more than *The Big Sick*, people seeing me on the Oscars, they just saw what I was like. Opportunities opened up after that. I think that was the biggest life change there was.

So was the TV anthology series *Little America* a passion project for you?

Yeah, it really was. It was one of those magical things that kind of fell into our lap. Lee Eisenberg had been a friend of ours for a long time; I'd actually done a pilot with him years ago. We'd written a pilot that never got made. Him and Josh Bearman, who runs *Epic* magazine, they had wanted to do a piece on specific stories of immigrants. A magazine piece. And Lee thought it would make a good TV show. So he came to us and to Alan Yang, and said, "It's an anthology based on true stories of immigrants." We immediately said yes.

In recent years, you've hit two real geek high points in *Star Wars* and *Marvel*. How did those experiences compare?

Well, I had a much bigger part in *Eternals*, so that really felt like I was part of this team. I was there in London, shooting for five months. It really felt like I was part of that family from the beginning to the end.

With *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, it was really, really fun, but I was definitely more in and out. It felt like it was their show, and I'm coming in a few days at a time to sort of play in their world and leave. So that was quite different. But they were both very, very fun jobs that were honestly so joyful for me. There was not a day I dreaded going to work, or a day that I wasn't sad that I was done working. That's a very rare thing.

Does your background in podcasting and celebrating nerdy culture give you a different perspective, compared to actors who come in not knowing that world?

Oh, for sure. I feel like I know these things in my bones. For something like *Eternals*,

I've been watching superhero movies my whole life, and reading comic books my whole life. And that movie really is a sci-fi movie in many ways more than a superhero movie.

And I've been watching these movies my entire life. You know, *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* was the greatest... I mean, it shook me. I was shaking after seeing that movie. With those movies, I still do a lot of prep, but I feel like I can trust myself more, because I know the tone of these movies and the cadence of them. So, yes, that was a huge advantage. When I did *Eternals*, I was like, "I've been preparing my entire life to do this movie." That's how I felt.

Have you or Marvel got any plans in place to reprise Kingo? He was the focus of a couple of little Easter eggs in the recent *Guardians Of The Galaxy Holiday Special* – do you hope that means a return appearance is due soon?

Yeah! I mean, listen, I have plans today. I don't know if they have plans. I would love to come back. But I'm sort of waiting to hear when or if that's going to happen. I'm hoping I get to do more. I had a great time playing that character. It'd be a shame if he's a sort of one and done. But, you know, the decision's not mine to make.

On your Twitter account you've been sharing a lot of *Welcome To Chippendales* reviews. Do you follow reviews closely?

Uh... I shouldn't. I do. I shouldn't. I'm sort of working towards not sharing reviews. It's definitely an issue. I've talked to a lot of people about it – a lot of people who do what I do, or people who are more successful than me, people who I look up to. And to a person, none of them read reviews. And they always have some origin story of when they stopped reading reviews. I really should not be reading them, and I'm working towards not reading them. That's the answer [laughs].

‘THERE WAS NOT A DAY I DREADED GOING TO WORK’

Does that pop-culture fandom background that we mentioned play into that? Because you've always come from a place of reading a lot about these things yourself?

Oh, yeah. Part of it is, I used to read reviews, you know? Since I was a kid, my dad had a big book of reviews, and I would just flip to random pages, and read reviews.

I love criticism. I love film criticism. Whenever a movie came out, I would go read what Roger Ebert had to say about it.

It shaped how I understand movies and how I watch movies. It changed how I look at stuff, and how I analyse stuff. So for me, reading

reviews was a big part of the experience.

I feel, now, film criticism has changed a little bit. You don't have these sort of name critics who hold a lot of influence, you know? I don't think that really exists any more. And I think Rotten Tomatoes has also changed the way that people read reviews, and the way that people write reviews as well.

So it's changed quite a bit. But I think that me reading the stuff does come from... You know, in school, I was also a very studious kid. I got good grades. It was important for me to get good grades. In some ways, reading reviews feels like I'm getting exam results, like my O-levels or something.

Finally, after all these recent achievements, are there any targets on the bucket list still?

Emily and I have written a couple of movies. I would love to make them. If there was a very specific list of things on my bucket list, I'd love to do them. I'd love to direct. What a cliché answer as an actor: I'd love to direct someday.

But then specifically about being in specific stuff – like I got to do *Marvel* and *Star Wars* – if there's anything else like that? Yes, there is. There are a few things like that, but I'm not going to say it, because I don't want to jinx it. But if they happen, I will let you know.

WELCOME TO CHIPPENDALES ALL EPISODES AVAILABLE ON DISNEY+ NOW.



Nanjiani's intergalactic immortal Kingo made a big impression in MCU epic *Eternals*.

KUMAIL NANJIANI LINE READING

“THIS IS A VIDEO OF MAXIMISING ALPHANESS.”

DINESH
SILICON VALLEY

“I've directed some things too.”

KINGO
ETERNALS

“YELLING ANYTHING AT A COMEDIAN IS CONSIDERED HECKLING. HECKLING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE NEGATIVE.”

KUMAIL
THE BIG SICK



EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
AWES

★★★★★
AMAZING STORY

★★★★★
NICE HOOK

★★★★★
GROSS
ENCOUNTER

★★★★★
TERMINAL



SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

88

THE FABELMANS

All about Steve...



REVIEWS



OUT NOW

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Avatar: The Way Of Water | ★★★★ | p94 |
| The Battle At Water Gate Bridge | ★★ | p99 |
| Dave Stevens: Drawn To Perfection | ★★★ | p92 |
| France | ★★ | p92 |
| I Wanna Dance With Somebody | ★★★★ | p98 |
| The Leech | ★★★ | p99 |
| A Man Called Otto | ★★★★ | p99 |
| The Pale Blue Eye | ★★★★ | p96 |
| Savage Justice | ★ | p97 |
| The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A #@%! | ★★★ | p91 |
| Wolf Manor | ★★★ | p99 |

13 JANUARY

| | | |
|-------------|------|-----|
| Enys Men | ★★★★ | p91 |
| The Estate | ★★ | p98 |
| The Old Way | ★★ | p97 |
| Tár | ★★★★ | p93 |

20 JANUARY

| | | |
|-----------------|------|-----|
| Babylon | ★★★★ | p90 |
| Dreaming Walls | ★★★ | p97 |
| The Hanging Sun | ★★ | p98 |
| Holy Spider | ★★★★ | p92 |
| More Than Ever | ★★★★ | p98 |
| The Substitute | ★★★★ | p99 |

22 JANUARY

| | | |
|-------|-----|-----|
| Alice | ★★★ | p98 |
|-------|-----|-----|

23 JANUARY

| | | |
|---------------|------|-----|
| The Harbinger | ★★★★ | p92 |
| I Love My Dad | ★★★ | p97 |

27 JANUARY

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|
| All The Beauty And The Bloodshed | ★★★★ | p97 |
| The Fabelmans | ★★★★★ | p88 |
| January | ★★★ | p92 |

ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

| TITLE | RELEASE DATE |
|-----------------|--------------|
| M3gan | 13 January |
| Plane | 27 January |
| Shotgun Wedding | 27 January |
| Unwelcome | 27 January |

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

EXTRAS

| | |
|---|---------|
| Archive/Blu-ray reviews | p100 |
| TV, Soundtracks, Extras, Games Preview, Books | p101-06 |

THE FABELMANS

12A

A boy's life...

★★★★★ OUT 27 JANUARY CINEMAS

SEE THIS
IF YOU
LIKED

RADIO DAYS 1987

Woody Allen's delightfully warm and witty evocation of his childhood.

SUPER 8 2011

Kids wrestle an alien monster and the art of moviemaking. Features a train crash. Produced by Spielberg.

LICORICE PIZZA 2021

Many auteurs have looked to their past recently. This PTA effort is the best of the lot.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

There's a scene in Steven Spielberg's period drama where parents Burt and Mitzi (Paul Dano, Michelle Williams) sit down with teenager Sammy (Gabriel LaBelle) and his three younger sisters to tell them they're getting a divorce. It's heartbreaking, as distressing to a nuclear family as the threat of the bomb that hung over America at the time. Then, mid-announcement, the footage flickers as it turns into grainy 16mm and Sammy imagines himself dispassionately filming the scene for a movie.

We know that Spielberg's parents really did get a divorce and it's informed a good deal of his work as a filmmaker, with themes of absent fathers, physically or emotionally, to be found in *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Hook* and more. But did young Steven really experience such a moment in such a way and then wait until his 34th feature, when he was in his mid-70s, to actually recreate it? Perhaps, perhaps not... this movie, though autobiographical, is not titled 'The Spielbergs', and the choice of substitute name clues viewers into the fact that Spielberg, ever the storyteller, is here liable to sprinkle events with artistic licence. What is it that the newspaper editor says in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a movie we spy Sammy watching with his pals? "Print the legend."

True or not, it says a lot about how artists filter the world and process pain. Just look at the film's opening events: in January 1952, the young(er) Sammy



(Mateo Zoryan Francis DeFord) is taken to the pictures to see DeMille's *The Greatest Show On Earth*. Replays of the climactic train wreck awaken him screaming in the night, and only by restaging it with a model train, and filming it on his dad's camera, can he package his emotions. Film, he discovers early, offers a neat frame to hold everything in place. It's also a whole lot of fun, and soon he's wrapping his siblings in toilet roll to make his very own mummy movies.

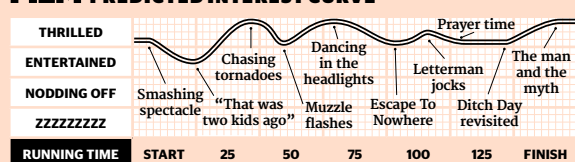
The Fabelmans tracks the next 13 years of the family's lives, as they move from New Jersey to Arizona to North Carolina, with Burt, a computer science whiz, chasing better-paid jobs at General Electric and IBM. Mitzi, a talented pianist, endures bouts of depression, and though she and Burt clearly share a good deal of love, she

DIRECTOR Steven Spielberg **STARRING** Gabriel LaBelle, Michelle Williams, Paul Dano, Seth Rogen, Judd Hirsch **SCREENPLAY** Tony Kushner, Steven Spielberg **DISTRIBUTOR** eOne **RUNNING TIME** 151 mins

can only truly be herself with (honorary) Uncle Benny (Seth Rogen). Burt is a good man but also a rather ineffectual one, who persistently derides his son's "hobby", imploring him to stop with the movies and "make something real." As for Sammy, his DIY efforts, replete with inventive effects, grow ever more ambitious, and he will soon learn of cinema's power to not just move people but to shape them, too.

"Family. Art. It will tear you in two," Sammy is told by his Great Uncle Boris (Judd Hirsch, popping in to steal a couple of scenes); duly, *The Fabelmans*

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™





Budding filmmaker Sammy Fabelman (Gabriel LaBelle) rallies the troops (his mates) in Spielberg's semi-autobiographical movie.

weighs up the cost of artistic endeavour and the obsessive commitment it requires. At times, making pictures seems trivial. Why bother when your folks are separating, or antisemitic bullies at school are making your life a daily hell? Such concerns recall the feeling of insignificance that the great stage actress Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullmann) wrestles with in Bergman's *Persona*, when images of the Vietnam War play on her TV. But then maybe art is of vital importance, a way to make sense of trauma or escape it altogether for a precious couple of hours...

Williams as Mitzi is rightly the performer being talked up for an Oscar – the screenplay by Spielberg and regular collaborator Tony Kushner (*West Side Story*, *Lincoln*) grants her some of the film's strongest scenes, and boy does she deliver. But the performances

'This movie is not titled "The Spielbergs"... And Spielberg, ever the storyteller, is here liable to sprinkle events with artistic licence'

are uniformly strong, with LaBelle aided by being a dead ringer for a young Spielberg. And while you could perhaps question whether Janusz Kaminski's lensing is too archly artful for such an episodic film pulled from life (might it have benefitted from a more naturalistic approach?), we again come back to the theme of filmmaking, and to that title: if this is truth, it's varnished.

And so it is that Spielberg, for all the pain on show, of course manages to find great compassion for the flawed people involved (this film suggests he has learned to forgive his father, whom he's previously blamed for the breakup), and to steer events towards something of

a happy ending. It's who Spielberg is, his optimism as much a part of him as his innate grasp of storytelling and his virtuoso technique. So while some might have preferred this story with its edges unsmoothed, *The Fabelmans* is better viewed as the tale of how Spielberg's personal values inform his every artistic decision, and how he became who he is: **THE GREATEST SHOWMAN ON EARTH**. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Steven Spielberg turns the camera on himself. This carefully calibrated look at the making of a master evokes wonder.



We've just got the pics from the TF Christmas party back from the chemists.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

THE DAY OF THE LOCUST 1975

Karen Black and William Atherton want to be in pictures in John Schlesinger's dark satire.

BOOGIE NIGHTS 1997
Mark Wahlberg is cock of the walk in Paul Thomas Anderson's delve into '70s skinflicks.

THE GREAT GATSBY 2013
Baz Luhrmann gives F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel a glitzy makeover.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

BABYLON¹⁸ Sex and silents...

★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY CINEMAS

You know the joke about the man in a bar who when asked why he's glum, reveals he spends his days sweeping elephant poop up at the circus. "Quit!" he is told. "And leave show business?" he replies.

One wonders if writer/director Damien Chazelle had that old gag in mind while filming a scene near the start of his latest where a poor lackey pushing a truck up a hill gets showered in pachyderm faeces. It's a sequence that serves as a pungent visual metaphor for the film's scabrous depiction of a '20s Hollywood where the lowly quite literally get shat on. (The lofty get vomited and peed upon, but that's another story.) Here and elsewhere, *Babylon* reveals the depths those seduced by Tinseltown will

DIRECTOR Damien Chazelle **STARRING** Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie, Diego Calva, Jean Smart, Jovan Adepo, Li Jun Li **SCREENPLAY** Damien Chazelle **DISTRIBUTOR** Paramount **RUNNING TIME** 189 mins

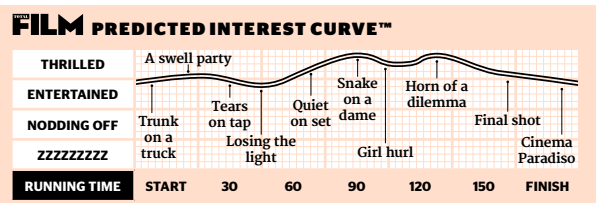
descend to, if only to get within touching distance of its glamour.

Over the course of three lurid, frenetic and swirling hours, Chazelle follows three such moths drawn to the flame: wannabe starlet Nellie (Margot Robbie), gifted trumpeter Sidney (Jovan Adepo) and eager dreamer Manny (Diego Calva) – as well as a hedonistic film star (Brad Pitt's Jack Conrad) whose days are as numbered as the silent romances he appears in. Parties, premieres and mishap-ridden shoots vividly conjure up an immersive vision of Hollywood's golden era, albeit one just a coke-snort away from debauchery and degradation. Crammed to the gills with epic crowd scenes, extended tracking shots and farcical set-pieces, the result is a big chunk of cinema that culminates in an extraordinary

psychedelic montage on the moving image's evolution. You can't fault Chazelle for his ambition, though you might wish he would take a breather now and then. There really is no let-up here, with a Robbie performance of such wild abandon it makes Harley Quinn look comatose. (And that's *before* she picks a fight with a rattlesnake.)

In a film of this length it's both a shame and a troubling oversight that Adepo's part seems so perfunctory. His role as a musician who's bullied into wearing degrading make-up deserves rather more than the scant screen-time he's afforded. But amid the chaos there are heart-tugging notes of poignancy, with Manny's doomed ardour for feckless Nellie and Jack's realisation that he's surplus to requirements elevating the saga to *La La Land* levels of pathos. That's a wrap... **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT The style might cause whiplash, but it's worth it for the thrilling momentum Chazelle brings to his revisionist filmdom fantasia.



ENYS MEN ¹⁵

Petalguru...

★★★★★ OUT 13 JANUARY CINEMAS

Cornish filmmaker Mark Jenkin came out of nowhere with his much-admired 16mm monochrome movie *Bait* back in 2019. Employing similar lo-fi techniques, he stays local with his beguiling follow-up. *Enys Men* is a folk horror – a popular arena for British filmmakers of late (see Ben Wheatley’s *In The Earth* and Alex Garland’s *Men*). Here, Jenkin delivers his own (very) idiosyncratic take on a subgenre that ploughs into ancient British lore.

Set in 1973 on an uninhabited Cornish outcrop, it centres on a nameless woman, credited only as The Volunteer, played by Mary Woodvine. Living alone, she steadfastly goes about daily observations, from testing the depth of a cavern to chronicling the growth of a small red flower. With minimal dialogue – bar the occasional blarings from a transistor radio – Jenkin carefully builds a distinctive atmosphere. Between the ominous sounds and shots of a dead fisherman, the sense of isolation really begins to take hold.

What’s interesting about *Enys Men* (‘stone island’ in Cornish) is how Jenkin doesn’t go for obvious jump scares or creeping dread. Like the best psychological dramas, the film gets inside the head of its protagonist, as her sanity begins to waver. Woodvine gives a brave performance, joining her *Bait* co-star Edward Rowe, cast here as a boatman who visits the island. The result is a strange but satisfying hymn to the rhythms and mysteries of Cornish life. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Fans of *Bait*’s minimalism will dig Jenkin’s uncompromising folk-horror curio. Unique and eerie.



The flowers are doing OK, but the sausage crop is magnificent this year.



If Manson truly doesn't give one, why has he grawlixed his own film's title?

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A #@%! ¹⁵

He swears it well...

★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

You are going to DIE someday,” is the ballsy opening message of this surprisingly fun, glossy big-screen docu-take on Mark Manson’s mega-bestselling self-help book. Only a guru as swearily genial as Manson could get away with outlining his doctrine of hard truths (you aren’t special, happiness is elusive, suffering is unavoidable) and make it look appealingly like tough love.

Director Nathan Price wraps Manson’s straight-to-camera retelling of his dodgy, thrill-seeking youth in slick, slo-mo dramatic recreations of his teen drug bust, broken first love and a cliff-jumping tragedy. Pumping up the storytelling with constant archive eye candy that illustrates asshole behaviour with symbolic exploding cars and King Kong rampages, the film feels afraid to let Manson’s accessible life philosophy roll out unaided.

The doco’s constant picture-party is the sugar that helps Manson’s sterner medicine go down (“Change is brutal! Use death as a life compass!”), but it starts to feel like filler after a while. But the real star of this souped-up guide to Stoicism may actually be Disappointment Panda, a deadpan, room-wrecking psycho from a hilarious set of Egyptian cheese adverts. And there’s nothing subtle about his lack of #@%ls given. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Manson’s tough-love life guide gets a slick, bro-tastic big-screen makeover that prioritises fun over fear.



DAVE STEVENS: DRAWN TO PERFECTION

TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

"Jungle girls, masked villains, rocket men..." You name it, Dave Stevens drew it. The Rocketeer creator receives a loving tribute in this amiable but slight doc, plotting the self-styled perfectionist's slow-burn path to comics fame. Friends and ex-wives detail how Stevens befriended pin-up Bettie Page and became Spielberg's storyboarder. Some themes are handled sketchily (Stevens' interest in the female form – and strip clubs) and others are superficial (his sideburns), but an affectionate picture emerges of a talent whose toughest critic was himself, gone before his time. **KEVIN HARLEY**



FRANCE

TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW MUBI

Bruno Dumont's latest is strangely out of keeping for the French auteur (*L'Humanité*, *Twenty-nine Palms*). A rather messy look at TV journalism, it stars Léa Seydoux as France de Meurs, a celebrity-news anchor whose life starts to unravel after a minor traffic accident. Part satire, part screwball comedy, the film succeeds as neither, despite the elegant Seydoux convincingly channelling the glamour and gumption of a top reporter. As for Dumont, he seems lost in a story that falls well short of the iconic likes of James L. Brooks' *Broadcast News* (1987). **JAMES MOTTRAM**



Zar Amir Ebrahimi as
the fictional journalist
seeking justice.

HOLY SPIDER

18

To catch a killer...

★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY CINEMAS 10 MARCH MUBI

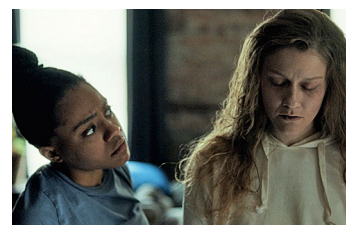
The crimes and eventual punishment of a real-life killer who preyed on sex workers in early 2000s Iran are chillingly reprised in this grimly compelling procedural. Ali Abbasi's film outwardly conforms to genre conventions, not least in having its coldly calculating villain pursued by a resourceful female journalist. However, the director (2018's *Border*) takes aim not just at the murderer, but at the society that created him.

Dubbed the 'Spider Killer', the real Saeed Hanaei (played here by Mehdi Bajestani) committed his crimes in the belief he was doing God's work. *Holy Spider* starts in the middle of his killing spree, one police show little interest in curtailing. Frustrated by this, reporter Rahimi (Zar Amir Ebrahimi) – an invention of the filmmakers – makes it her mission to bring Hanaei to book.

Viewers should be warned that Abbasi recreates Hanaei's atrocities in graphic fashion. But he also ensures that each of the victims is established as a character before they are killed, allowing them the dignity Iranian women are routinely stripped of in life as well as death.

Amir Ebrahimi (Best Actress at Cannes 2022), meanwhile, invests her role with a stern moral fury, even if the film occasionally strains credibility in its efforts to make a clearly composite character so central to the story. There's no doubt, though, that *Holy Spider* succeeds in starkly exposing the toxic nature of zealotry fuelled by misogyny. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT An intense, gripping dramatisation that, a few liberties apart, does justice to a disturbing true story.



THE HARBINGER

15

★★★★★ OUT 23 JANUARY

DIGITAL

Using the pandemic as a narrative springboard, American horror filmmaker Andy Mitton (2018's *The Witch In The Window*) crafts a typically smart, sensitive chiller that explores loss in all its forms. While shielding with her family in upstate New York, Monique (Gabby Beans) is called to Brooklyn to help her old roommate Mavis (Emily Davis), who's experiencing a series of *Elm Street*-style nightmares featuring a mysterious, plague-masked figure. Beans is an appealing lead, and the film perfectly captures the desperation of trying to connect in a world gone to pieces. **MATT GLASBY**



JANUARY

12A

★★★★★ OUT 27 JANUARY

CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Here's an eerie slice of Eastern European allegorical absurdism, courtesy of director Andrey M. Paounov and co-writer Alex Barrett. The setting is a semi-derelect, snowbound complex in the mountains of north-west Bulgaria, where two unnamed men, who are awaiting the return of the owner from a hunting expedition, receive some sinister visitors... Combining stylised black-and-white imagery and sound design with more than a few nods to Kubrick's *The Shining*, *January* sustains its disquieting atmosphere throughout a macabre tale of apparitions, curses and fatal disappearances. **TOM DAWSON**

Cate Blanchett as the monstrous but brilliant Lydia Tár.

TÁR₁₅

Baton down the hatches...

★★★★★ OUT 13 JANUARY CINEMAS

An exploration of artistry with a capital 'A', Todd Field's first film since 2006's *Little Children* follows the private and professional tribulations of conductor Lydia Tár (a towering Cate Blanchett) as she preps for a performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony in Berlin. Field and Blanchett aren't interested in spoon-feeding the classical-music world to the uninitiated, or in making Lydia necessarily likeable.

She's predatory, provocative, selfish, self-destructive, abrasive and contrary. The only sensitivity she feels is via her hyperacusis condition, which means fridge beeps, car rattles and distant screams stress her.

A trailblazing force of nature on the podium, Lydia may be in a relationship with violinist Sharon (Nina Hoss) and co-parent a daughter, but rumours of impropriety (sexual, political and professional) dog her as she wrestles with pretenders to her throne (Mark Strong, excellent as a wealthy wannabe), social media and her fascination with

DIRECTOR Todd Field **STARRING** Cate Blanchett, Noémie Merlant, Nina Hoss, Sophie Kauer, Mark Strong **SCREENPLAY** Todd Field **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 158 mins

new cellist Olga (newcomer Sophie Kauer). Incendiary on stage, can Tár stop herself from imploding?

Field's love letter to orchestras is as uncompromising as his protagonist. The film opens with a long onstage interview, where Lydia discusses music, conductors, form and art in terms that will likely prompt a post-viewing googling. Blanchett is so jarringly performative in her answers that you wonder if this is finally the role she cannot master. Later, though, when we see Lydia presenting in varying degrees in different environments (at work, in a Juilliard class, domestically), the layers peel back, revealing a complicated woman and a nuanced performance.

The building of Lydia's character is given so much care that it takes an hour

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

ALL ABOUT EVE 1950
Established female star, young wannabe... Tár takes cues from the Bette Davis classic.

BLACK SWAN 2010
The ballerina psychodrama shares themes of self-sabotage and reinvention.

WHIPLASH 2014
J.K. Simmons excels as the brutally toxic jazz teacher Fletcher in Damien Chazelle's drama.

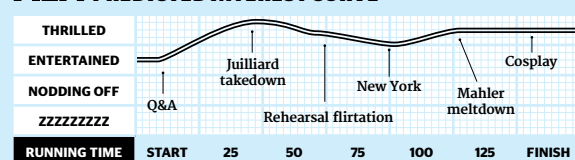
For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

before we even see her twirling a baton, orgasmically engaged in the music and pulling beauty from the strings of her players. Here, Field/Blanchett manage to show, without simplification, tangible virtuosity: the scenes with the orchestra and Kauer are alive and transporting.

Lydia is not the only multifaceted woman in *Tár*, however. Her partner Sharon and assistant Francesca (Noémie Merlant) thrum with rich interior life (battling infidelity and thwarted ambition, respectfully), while Kauer delivers a star-making turn in her debut. Field, meanwhile, makes an auspicious comeback, his movie asking key questions about cancel culture, artistic integrity and gender, while also providing a primer on orchestral politics and musical history. **JANE CROWTHER**

THE VERDICT Tár won't be everyone's tempo, but as ambitious, full-fat films about the creative process go, it's worthy of applause. And Blanchett stuns.

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER

The bigger blue...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

SEE THIS
IF YOU
LIKED

**STAR WARS:
EPISODE V
- THE EMPIRE
STRIKES BACK**
1980

New worlds,
dad-shocks, new
myths: all
Cameron's sequel
needs is a "No,
I am..." mic-drop.

WHALE RIDER
2002

Niki Caro's drama
shares whales
and Pacific
Islands culture
with Cameron -
and co-star
Cliff Curtis.

FINDING NEMO
2003

Between the
over-protective
dad-ing and the
aquarium effect,
Cameron swims
in Pixar's waters.

For more reviews
visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

Before he became King Of The World, James Cameron was king of the bigger, better blockbuster sequel. Even if his long-awaited return to Pandora can't match *Aliens* or *T2* for focused tanker-weight efficiency, Cameron's comeback cleaves close enough to uphold that reputation. And it sure leaves *Piranha II*'s flying fish standing.

Will it join the \$2bn club, as Cameron implies it must? We'll see, but it certainly is a sometimes surreal, always spectacular sensory hit with an undertow of gentle emotion, an overflow of ambition and a pleasingly earnest thematic thrust. It might take multiple viewings to unpick some plot threads... and three more films. But if anyone can mount a case for the repeat-visit cinema experience, Cameron can.

Since most people have visited Pandora before, Cameron wastes little time on scene-setting. The opening parachutes fast into Pandora's jungle, where gone-total-Na'vi Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) now raise their expanded family. There's their own kids, Neteyam (Jamie Flatters), Lo'ak (Britain Dalton) and Tuktirey (Trinity Bliss), plus the adoptees: Kiri (Sigourney Weaver) is the sort-of-child of Grace's avatar (from the first film), while Spider (Jack Champion) is a feral human orphaned by war. Jake believes protecting his family gives him purpose. So when villainous Colonel Quaritch (Stephen Lang) returns in Recombinant avatar form seeking payback for his demise, the Sully fam seeks refuge among



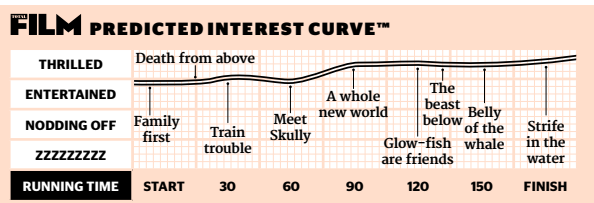
Pandora's sea clans. But can they run from Quaritch's new blue marines forever? And isn't navigating risk an essential learning curve?

While this bare-bones set-up reflects Cameron's pulp punch as a writer, his staggering proficiency as a world-builder is also displayed. This time, Cameron leaves little time to pause and admire Pandora's plant life. The verdant jungle now feels lived-in, alive. Meanwhile, with life on earth barely viable, the RDA (Resources Development Administration) has bigger designs on Pandora. Their base of operations is a small city, where tech upgrades include robo-spiderly swarm assemblers that construct buildings in days. When the humans land on Pandora, Cameron makes sure you feel the devastation wrought in their wake.

In CG terms, *The Way Of Water*

DIRECTOR James Cameron **STARRING** Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Kate Winslet, Stephen Lang, Sigourney Weaver
SCREENPLAY James Cameron, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver **DISTRIBUTOR** Disney
RUNNING TIME 192 mins

certainly has the WOW factor. Hair and skin glisten, flames and dust motes transfix: 13 years on, *Avatar*'s spectacle-cinema upgrade has been bested. Yet just as *Avatar* took time to introduce audiences to Pandora's groovy wonderland, so the big reveal this time is the reef, home to the Metkayina clan. The ocean world is luminous, tactile, serene. As the 3D visuals glow in sync with Simon Franglen's chiming score, the sense of weightless immersion in the waters shows a fresh, tender grace in Cameron's direction. He brings





Riding with the tulkuns in
Cameron's magical
watery wonder world.

respect to the ocean too, not just enraptured love: the waters are alluring and dangerous. And when their occupants are mistreated, the sense of horror is palpable.

Cast-wise, Kate Winslet (as Metkayina clan co-leader Ronal) and Saldaña are held back a little too much, but Worthington aces the formerly in-training Na'vi turned training-on-the-job dad. Weaver projects Kiri's feelings of outsider-dom – and sulky eye-rolls – touchingly through the mo-cap, dissolving the actor/character age gap. Among the terrific young actors, Dalton brings heart to bonding scenes with the whale-like tulkun, scenes that might otherwise have gone a bit *Free Willy*. And Champion makes feral work of the Newt-ish Spider, whose side-plot develops Cameron's thoughts on family.

'When the plot strands converge for the climax, Cameron channels previous career highs into a blast of full-bore, high-stakes spectacle'

Though Cameron spends no time on *Avatar* refresher courses, he does sometimes lean on known beats. While sea creatures the *Avatar* ilk are rethinks of *Avatar*'s ikrans, the Sully clan's water-training reworks Jake's old Na'vi training. Cameron even repeats himself a little within the film: when one character sighs, "Can't believe I'm tied up again," you wonder if a little trimming might have been advised.

The stop-start plotting is also slightly problematic, with some characters and their struggles seemingly vanishing for stretches. Yet when the plot strands converge for the climax, Cameron channels previous career

highs into a blast of full-bore, high-stakes spectacle, reminding you who's in charge. *T2*'s tech, *Titanic*'s watery horror-show, *Aliens*' child peril, *The Abyss*' weird wonder: it's all here, maximised for tension, action and emotion. When the flames clear, some dangling story strands leave more questions than answers. But three follow-ups are planned... Even at three hours-plus, Cameron's comeback leaves you ready for more. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT An imperfect but imposing blockbuster: dazzling, supersized, rippled with currents of sincere feeling.



"Hello darkness, my old friend..."
Christian Bale stars in Scott
Cooper's gothic whodunit.

SEE THIS
IF YOU
LIKED

HOUSE OF USHER 1960

The first of Roger Corman's eight Poe adaptations, with Vincent Price embroiled in gothic madness.

THE RAVEN 2012

John Cusack plays Poe in this tale of a serial killer committing murders inspired by the author.

OUT OF THE FURNACE 2013

The first Cooper/Bale match-up, a blue-collar thriller set in Appalachian Pennsylvania.

For more reviews
visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

THE PALE BLUE EYE ¹⁵

Friend or Poe...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS, NETFLIX

The *Pale Blue Eye* mixes a little fact with a lot of fiction. The sliver of truth – that author Edgar Allan Poe attended West Point when he was 21 – is melded into a gothic mystery that could so easily come from the pages of the iconic author's work. Set in 1830, in the Hudson Valley, it sees veteran detective Augustus Landor (Christian Bale) summoned to the aforementioned New York military academy to solve a gruesome crime. A cadet has been found hanged, with his body mutilated – his heart carved out of his corpse.

Hired by Timothy Spall's officious academy officer – who orders that Augustus completes his detective work without drinking – the world-weary

DIRECTOR Scott Cooper **STARRING** Christian Bale, Lucy Boynton, Harry Melling, Toby Jones, Gillian Anderson, Robert Duvall
SCREENPLAY Scott Cooper **DISTRIBUTOR** Netflix **RUNNING TIME** 128 mins

snoop begins his thankless task. Soon enough, he runs into the young Poe (Harry Melling), ensconced in the local inn overseen by Charlotte Gainsbourg's welcoming barkeep. It's a great turn from *The Queen's Gambit* star, who brings an enigmatic quality to Poe, informing Augustus that the perpetrator he seeks is a poet. The clues get no less strange as the film progresses.

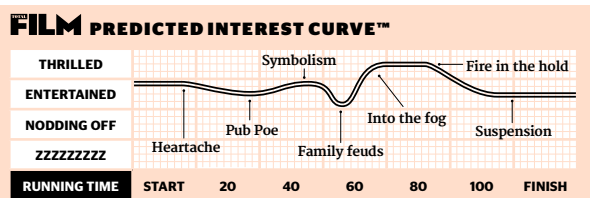
More eerie goings-on follow, with the internal organs of a cow and sheep suffering similarly grim violations. Who could be doing this and why? Is it Poe? He certainly had a run-in with the dead cadet. Then there's Toby Jones' West Point surgeon, Dr. Daniel Marquis, who helps with the initial autopsy, and his family: Gillian Anderson's drama-queen spouse, Julia, and their two grown-up children Artemus (Harry Lawtey) and

Lea (Lucy Boynton). "We are hereditarily blessed," squeaks Julia, in one of her odd pronouncements.

Adapting from the 2003 novel by Louis Bayard, writer/director Scott Cooper and his team capture the period exquisitely, from gloomily lit interiors to chilly blankets of fog and snow outside. The atmosphere Cooper conjures is more unsettling than outright terrifying, despite a story that dips into the satanic (a word also for Robert Duvall's fine cameo as an occult scholar).

On his third Cooper film after *Out of The Furnace* and *Hostiles*, Bale leads with typical craft. True, the pacing is borderline-snoozy at times. But if you stick with it, there's an engrossing Poe-inspired whodunit here, perfectly engineered for those who like their detective stories both literary and thoughtful. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT More leisurely than explosive, *The Pale Blue Eye* has all the qualities of a good old-fashioned page-turner. Intriguing, absorbing – and freaky.





THE OLD WAY ¹⁵

★★★★★ OUT 13 JAN CINEMAS

Stoked about the fact that Nicolas Cage has finally saddled up for some bona-fide western action? Well, hold your horses: Montana backdrop aside, there's little to yee-haw about in this lacklustre sins-of-the-father saga. Opening flashbacks – or 'tache-backs, if you will – see Cage's gunslinger Colton Briggs kill the dad of future outlaw Noah Le Gros, who years later comes seeking revenge. More talky than tense, less stripped-back than sketchy, it lacks true grit and – even worse – any redeeming fits of Cage rage. Here's hoping the star's other upcoming oater, *Butcher's Crossing*, is more on-target.

MATTHEW LEYLAND



I LOVE MY DAD ¹⁵

★★★★★ OUT 23 JANUARY DIGITAL

When writer/director/star James Morosini's dad pretended to be a pretty girl on Facebook in an attempt to restore contact with his estranged filmmaker son, he could hardly have imagined the result: a based-on-true-events cringe comedy of virtual transgression that sees well-meaning Chuck (Patton Oswalt) inadvertently catfish the vulnerable Franklin (Morosini) by using oblivious waitress Becca (Claudia Sulewski) as his online avatar. The confusions that follow are played for maximum awkwardness. Overall, though, James's farce feels rather too forgiving towards the daddy of all deceptions. NEIL SMITH



SAVAGE JUSTICE ¹⁵

★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL 13 FEBRUARY DVD

Addicts Shelby John (Jack Huston) and Ruby Red (Willa Fitzgerald) vow to get clean, but local dealers have other plans in this asinine revenge drama, which takes half its running time to reach the inciting incident. An unconvincing Huston mostly looks bewildered, and little wonder: at one point he herds cows to sneak into a drug baron's compound before shooting up the place to an appalling cover of 'Amazing Grace'. Relegated to a fruitless subplot, Robert De Niro's sheriff spends the film looking like he's smelled something terrible – the script would be our best guess.

CHRIS SCHILLING



DREAMING WALLS ^{TBC}

★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY CINEMAS, DIGITAL

New York's iconic Chelsea Hotel has had a chaotic journey towards renovation as a luxury establishment, thanks in part to protests from permanent residents as the building around them slowly changes. Maya Duverdier and Amélie van Elmbt's doc offers glimpses of these people's stories, as well as the hotel's wider legacy as a symbol of '60s counterculture: former regulars of this artists' hangout include Patti Smith, Dylan Thomas and Allen Ginsberg. Given the bohemian vibes, the pacing is languid, with the film perhaps working best as an argument for preservation.

JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS



Fighting the good fight: artist and activist Nan Goldin.

ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED ¹⁵

Goldin years...

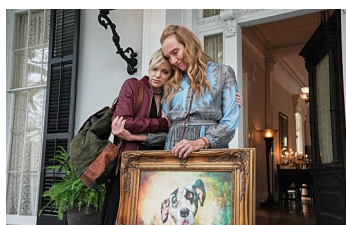
★★★★★ OUT 27 JANUARY CINEMAS

An art-crammed, pain-threaded confessional, this portrait of photographer Nan Goldin is astonishingly intimate. Winding together photo essays of her '70s/'80s New York boho life with her recent guerilla art activism against big-pharma moguls the Sackler family, it's got real handcuffs-and-high-stakes drama going on.

Director Laura Poitras, a veteran of antihero-activist docs, lets Goldin tell her own wild-child story. From fatal family secrets through to '80s photo projects such as *The Ballad Of Sexual Dependency*, it unflinchingly depicts the sex, drugs and brutal beatings of her relationships. Her husky memories create a vivid insider's view of a now-vanished world of drag queens, hustlers and sex workers, destroyed by the Aids epidemic.

Switching adroitly between Goldin's unvarnished past and her battling present, Poitras embeds herself in her subject's illegal guerilla protests in venues such as the Louvre, where survivors of OxyContin addiction (such as Goldin herself) demand that the Sacklers' donation be scrubbed from museums. As a snowfall of fake prescriptions tumbles into the Guggenheim Museum, kicking off a flash-mob 'die-in' by Goldin's group, Poitras's camera puts you at the heart of the action. This sharp-eyed documentary recognises Goldin as a camera-toting warrior, one forever fighting the fights of society's outsiders. KATE STABLES

THE VERDICT A compassionate, career-spanning celebration of Goldin's determination to turn pain into opinion-shifting art.



THE ESTATE 15
★★★★★ OUT 13 JANUARY SKY
CINEMA/NOW

Comedy is relative in this flat-footed farce about two sisters (Anna Faris and Toni Collette) who decide to court their cantankerous aunt in the hope she'll put them in her will. Turns out their greedy cousins have had the same idea, instigating a laugh-free roundelay of malicious one-upmanship that bafflingly incorporates a convicted sex offender. Vulgarly was director Dean Craig's friend when he scripted 2010's *Death At A Funeral*. Here, alas, the funeral can't come too quickly, for all the entertaining eccentricity of Kathleen Turner's ill-tempered oldster. **NEIL SMITH**



THE HANGING SUN TBC
★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY SKY
CINEMA/NOW

Adapted from Jo Nesbø's novel *Midnight Sun*, this workaday Nordic noir from Italian photographer-turned-director Francesco Carrozzini simmers before boiling over. Alessandro Borghi plays John, a hitman hiding out on a remote island, where he befriends a mother (Jessica Brown Findlay) and her son (Raphael Vicas). Peter Mullan (as John's gangster father) and Sam Spruell (as troubled twins) bring some menace, but despite the intriguing setting – where daylight rarely relents – the drama never really takes off. Accents from all over the map don't exactly help matters. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



I WANNA DANCE WITH SOMEBODY 12A
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Britain's Naomi Ackie is spellbinding as tragic diva Whitney Houston in Kasi Lemmons' respectful bio, which follows the star's journey from gospel-loving teen to "the greatest voice of a generation", as Stanley Tucci's record exec dubs her. What goes up sadly comes down, from a rocky marriage to singer Bobby Brown (*Moonlight*'s Ashton Sanders) to devastating drug dependency. These later struggles are explored, but the film swerves an all-too-easy seedy last act, ending on the right kind of high. And Ackie? She hits high notes all the way. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



ALICE 15
★★★★★ OUT 22 JANUARY SKY
CINEMA/NOW

A Georgia slave (*Nope*'s Keke Palmer) flees her plantation to discover it's 1973 for everyone else in writer/director Krystin Ver Linden's debut feature, a nutty mash-up of Shyamalan, Blaxploitation and Lewis Carroll that is best swallowed in one magnanimous gulp. That the freshly emancipated Alice takes scarcely a day to acclimatise to her surroundings, absorb a century of history and transform herself into a gun-toting Coffy clone is just the beginning of its improbabilities. As a galvanic exercise in avenging wish-fulfilment, though, it works a treat. **NEIL SMITH**



Emotions run high for Mathieu and terminally ill Héléne.

MORE THAN EVER 15
Decision to leave...

★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY CINEMAS

The living cannot understand the dying," sighs Norwegian loner Bent (Bjørn Floberg) to his new online friend, a young woman in Bordeaux with a life-threatening respiratory condition. And it is this existential disconnect that gives Emily Atef's subtle drama its emotional driver: while our protagonist is determined to die on her own terms, her partner is insistent that she fight to the very end.

Mathieu (Gaspard Ulliel) is certainly nonplussed when Héléne (Vicky Krieps) chooses to go to Norway rather than stay in France and await a double lung transplant. For Héléne, though, a change of scene is just what the doctor ordered, with retired oil rigger Bent offering both a hut to kip in next to a fjord and the kind of level-headed, unsentimental counsel her loved ones can't provide.

When Mathieu arrives to plead his case in person, the stage is set for tear-inducing fireworks. Yet it is to Atef's credit that she resists the temptation, opting instead to keep the temperature as placid as the bucolic Scandinavian locations. Krieps, so majestically vivacious in *Corsage*, is no less impressive here in a role that pivots on quiet contemplation. For many, however, it will be Ulliel's presence that will resonate the most, his tragic death in a skiing accident last year ensuring the story feels all too rooted in reality. **NEIL SMITH**

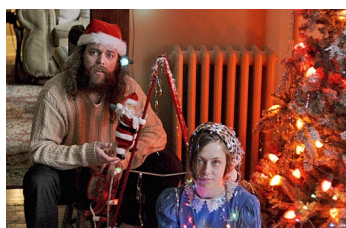
THE VERDICT An understated and compassionate film enriched by fine performances, gorgeous scenery and lovely woolly jumpers.



THE BATTLE AT WATER GATE BRIDGE 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, DIGITAL

This sequel to Chinese mega-hit *The Battle At Lake Changjin* (2021) continues the 1950-set Korean War story, as the 7th Infantry Company of the People's Volunteer Army battles US troops for control of a strategic crossing in freezing conditions. Co-directors Tsui Hark, Chen Kaige and Dante Lam ramp up the high-octane spectacle, gory deaths, Chinese-army heroism and terrible English dialogue. Other returnees include Wu Jing and Jackson Yee as sibling fighters, but 150 minutes of shellfire and non-existent characterisation may leave you drained. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



THE LEECH 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW BD, ARROW

Giving off strong *Inside No. 9* vibes, this witty black comedy from US writer/director Eric Pennycoff (2018's *Sadistic Intentions*) sees put-upon priest David (Graham Skipper) taking in homeless Terry (Jeremy Gardner) and his girlfriend Lexi (Taylor Zaudtke) over Christmas, with unholy results. When Terry isn't smoking, drinking, taking drugs or masturbating, he's trying to lead David astray, culminating in a game of Never Have I Ever that – of course – spins wildly out of control. Although things never get quite as crazy as they threaten to, this nonetheless remains a sadistic little stocking filler. **MATT GLASBY**



Tom Hanks plays against type as the curmudgeonly widower.

A MAN CALLED OTTO 15

Saving Mr. Hanks...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Fredrik Backman's bestseller *A Man Called Ove* has already spawned a 2015 Swedish adaptation, which garnered two Oscar nods. Now comes the inevitable Hollywood remake – although there's something perversely pleasing in seeing the typically genial Tom Hanks take the role of Ove, here renamed Otto Anderson.

Living alone in a small community, Otto is your classic curmudgeon, greeting neighbours with just a guttural growl. He's recently retired, following the death of his wife, Sonya. The devastating loss has left him suicidal – but more than once, Otto is interrupted in his efforts to end it all. Meanwhile, flashbacks to his youth (where he's played by Hanks' son Truman) reveal his first railway-station encounter with Sonya (Rachel Keller) and bring context to his mental state.

Gradually, Otto finds some crumbs to live for, whether it's helping Mariana Treviño's newcomer learn to drive, assisting a wheelchair-bound resident's living situation or looking after the stray cat that comes into his life. From *Finding Neverland* (2004) to *Christopher Robin* (2018), director Marc Forster has form in this sentimental arena, and he knows how to pluck those heartstrings. Some elements jar – notably the arrival of a crusading "social-media journalist" after Otto plays reluctant local hero. More concerning is the slightly glib treatment of mental health. Still, Hanks' misanthrope, calling everybody "nitwits" against a wintry backdrop, is never less than watchable. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

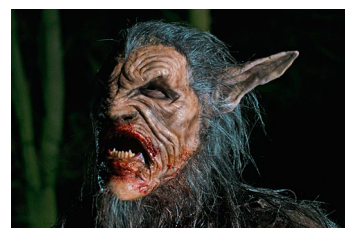
THE VERDICT Hanks fans and cat lovers alike will be moist-eyed. The more cynical may find it cloying.



THE SUBSTITUTE TBC

★★★★★ OUT 20 JANUARY CINEMAS

A rudderless literature teacher, Lucio (Juan Minujín), attempts to inspire students in a tough inner-city high school, grappling with teenage apathy and the influence of a local gangster. Sounds familiar, but Diego Lerman's gritty Argentinian drama couldn't be any less *Dangerous Minds*. This sombre character study is more invested in Lucio's sense of isolation and listlessness, thoughtfully played by Minujín. Well-observed writing and lively young talent (including firebrand Lucas Arrua) cut through the classroom cliché, leaving plenty to ruminate on after the credits have rolled. **JOEL HARLEY**



WOLF MANOR 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, DIGITAL

Emmerdale vet-turned-horror director Dominic Brunt (*Before Dawn*, *Attack Of The Adult Babies*) takes on the werewolf mythos in his latest budget feature. Disaster strikes when a crew of filmmakers attempts to make their vampire movie in a remote country house. First they're beset by incompetence, then bloodthirsty lycanthropes. Stars James Fleet and Thaila Zucchi are good value as sozzled old ham and overworked set assistant respectively, while the messy splatter largely works in the film's favour. However, Brunt's ambition is undermined by budget when it comes to the murky visuals and phoney-looking werewolf suit. **JOEL HARLEY**



DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI ^U

1920 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Alternate scores, Documentary, Video essays, Featurette, Book

Celebrating its 103rd birthday this year, Robert Wiene's groundbreaking gothic chiller must surely be the oldest film yet to grace 4K UHD. And what a treat it is, too. The uptick in clarity brings even more refinement to the German expressionist visuals integral to this tale of a twisted hypnotist (Werner Krauss) and his somnambulist pawn (Conrad Veidt). Updated extras include a new commentary, an expanded book and a discussion of cinema's depictions of psychiatric hospitals. **ANTON VAN BEEK**



CROUPIER ¹⁵

1998 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD, 4K UHD EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Documentary, Featurettes, Booklet, Poster

Mike Hodges' tale of Jack Manfred, a wannabe author who slips back into his old ways by taking a job at a casino, sees star Clive Owen at his finest: charismatic, suave, dangerous. He's well supported by Alex Kingston, Kate Hardie and Gina McKee as the women circling Manfred's life, in a story by Paul Mayersberg (*The Man Who Fell To Earth*) with delicious film-noir trimmings. It may not be as volcanic as Hodges' classic *Get Carter*, but it's still worth betting your chips on. New extras include a feature-length career chat with the director. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



RASHOMON ^{12A}

1950 ★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Many films have unreliable narrators, but Akira Kurosawa's classic (back in cinemas as part of a BFI retrospective) goes further, suggesting that the truth itself is unknowable. It shows the murder of a samurai (Masayuki Mori) from the POV of a bandit (Toshiro Mifune), his wife (Machiko Kyo), the samurai's ghost and a woodcutter (Takashi Shimura), playing out differently each time. Beyond its intriguing and influential conceit, the nuanced acting, ominous music and use of dappled light have all stood the test of time. Winner of Venice's Golden Lion, *Rashomon* put Japanese film, and Kurosawa, on the world-cinema map. **LEILA LATIF**



THE TRIAL ^{PG}

1962 ★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL EXTRAS ★★★★★ Documentary, Featurettes, Deleted scene

"The best film I have ever made," said Orson Welles of his adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel. Shot on locations in Paris, Zagreb and Rome, it centres on office worker Josef K. (Anthony Perkins), who is visited at home by the secret police and told he must stand trial for an offence that is never named. Thanks to the monumental sets and monochrome lensing, *The Trial* remains a visual triumph – yet its baroque swagger rather overshadows the performances of its ensemble cast (including Jeanne Moreau and Welles himself). **TOM DAWSON**

KING KONG ¹²

Monkeying around with a classic...

1976 ★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Extended TV cut, Featurettes, Deleted scenes

No one cry when *Jaws* die. But when the monkey die, people gonna cry." So proclaimed Dino De Laurentiis in a 1976 interview with *TIME* magazine about his \$24m remake of *King Kong*. Viewed today, it's hard to imagine those people shedding anything other than tears of laughter.

It could be argued that the ape masks, full-size mechanical props and rear projection used to bring the 1976 *Kong* to the screen were, in their own way, as groundbreaking as Willis O'Brien's stop-motion animation for the 1933 original. The end result, however, is far less successful, flitting between obvious man-in-a-suit shots and scenes of vacant heroine Dwan (Jessica Lange in her first film role) screaming in terror while helpfully walking into a full-size *Kong* hand.

Sadly, the film's problems run deeper still. Other than palaeontologist Jeff Bridges, the cast are pretty terrible, not helped by a script that's unwilling to settle on a single tone. One moment it's a rollicking family adventure, the next it's cracking jokes about infamous skin flick *Deep Throat*. The latter is at least in keeping with its unbridled horniness, the filmmakers choosing to turn the subtext of the original into text, transforming *Kong* into a 40ft sex pest (complete with leering expression). Decent extras, at least, including a commentary by make-up king Rick Baker. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT A fulsome 4K package for a remake that's really only fun for all the wrong reasons.



Jessica Lange: doing her best not to laugh.

STUDIOCANAL, EUREKA, BFI, ARROW

FRESH SPINS

Two beauties tapping hidden depths...



WOMEN TALKING

★★★★★

Alongside her radical score for *Tár*, Hildur Guðnadóttir (*Joker*) composes a trad but tangibly felt score for Sarah Polley's drama. Using textured folk sounds to mirror the rural environment, Hildur also evokes the extremes of the women's experiences depicted. Call-to-prayer bells and low-end cellos ('He's Here') shudder with dread, while the acoustic guitar and strings of 'Speak Up' and stand-out 'Always' imply something warmer: a sense of hope emerging from community.



BONES AND ALL

★★★★★

After 2020's *Soul*/*Mark* one-two, Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross reassert their adaptability for Luca Guadagnino's star-crossed cannibal road movie. Acoustic guitars and lowering synths stake out extremes of grace and unease: 'I'm With You' yearns; 'It's Your Turn' throbs. The results map romantic yearnings on to romanticised spaces, before finding resolution between the lovely 'Normal Life' and 'You Made It Feel Like' Home: an outsider hymn of disarming delicacy.

"Thompson Twins didn't make *TF*'s Top 10." "I know. Shameful..."



CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK

JOHN HUGHES

Ten '80s bangers from the teen-com auteur's hits...

'IF YOU LEAVE', ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK
PRETTY IN PINK (1986)

OMD purists may sniff, but to hell with haughty. Recorded last-minute to replace 'Goddess Of Love', *Pretty*'s prom theme crystallises the film's heart-melting late-teens feels. Don't let go at any price.

'BRILLIANT MIND', FURNITURE
SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL (1987)

Baritone melodrama in *The National*'s stately style, this London band's brooding beauty was used by Hughes to soundtrack a teary meltdown. The great forgotten '80s hit? Indeed, but Hughes – an Anglo-pop connoisseur – remembered.

'DON'T YOU (FORGET ABOUT ME)', SIMPLE MINDS
THE BREAKFAST CLUB (1985)

The opening drum kick, the terrace-sized "Hey-hey-hey-HEY..." Written by Keith Forsey/Steve Schiff, the arty Scottish new-wavers' mega-hit banked their stadium ascension and gave Hughes' detention movie its heroic air-punch send-off.

'WEIRD SCIENCE', OINGO BOINGO
WEIRD SCIENCE (1985)

Described by Oingo Boingo's Danny Elfman as "a goof", 'Weird's fairground funk-pop surely made his later Tim Burton pairing seem inevitable. Either way, the song is a winningly wonky anomaly in Hughes' hipster-sentimental song-ography.

'PRETTY IN PINK', THE PSYCHEDELIC FURS
PRETTY IN PINK (1986)

A Brit-music devotee, Hughes still misread the brothers Butler's post-punk outsider song. But, as with Simple Minds' Hughes hit, its drum kick and low-slung guitar surge entwine inextricably with the film that banked its fame.

'EIGHTIES', KILLING JOKE

WEIRD SCIENCE (1985)

Hughes wanted to use doo-wop for his oddball comedy. When the choice didn't work, music man Ron Payne pitched alternatives: enter Killing Joke's punk-metal valentine to Hughes' decade.

'BRING ON THE DANCING HORSES', ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN
PRETTY IN PINK (1986)

The Scouse post-punks brought flushes of romantic melodrama to Hughes' high school, with Ian McCulloch in lavish voice. Director Richard Kelly clearly took notes for *Donnie Darko*'s Bunnymen moment.

'OH YEAH', YELLO

FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF (1986)

Heard from ads to films, the Swiss eccentrics' electro-pop oddity accompanied Ferris' hot Ferrari moment. In the late '80s, the cut became so inescapable it made *The Simpsons*' parody seemed inevitable. Chika-chika!

'THE HARDEST WALK', THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN
SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL (1987)

Long before *Lost In Translation*, Hughes clocked the honeyed melodic classicism behind the East Kilbride brothers' noise-pop insouciance. '...Walk' is perfect music for skimming someone's records to: bruised and cool, grumpy and sublime.

'THIS WOMAN'S WORK', KATE BUSH
SHE'S HAVING A BABY (1988)

Crisis was the mother of invention when This Mortal Coil refused to license their version of 'Song To The Siren' to Hughes. Enter Kate Bush, whose tender reverie on motherhood is a weepie wonder: a devastating farewell to youth. **KEVIN HARLEY**

LIFE MOVES PRETTY FAST: THE JOHN HUGHES MIXTAPES IS OUT NOW VIA DEMON MUSIC GROUP.



COLLECTIBLES

ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA FUNKO POP!

OUT NOW

Standing between 9–11cm tall, these vinyl bobbleheads would likely tower over their Quantum Realm counterparts. On the good side there's a suitably antsy-looking Ant-Man and a winged Wasp (with a one-in-six chance you'll get her helmet-less 'chase' variant). And for the baddies we have M.O.D.O.K. (aloft on his Doomsday Chair) and an even bigger bad (in ambition, if not bonce), Kang. Yes, without 'The Conqueror'; he's still new to the MCU, give him a chance. Size them up at funkoeurope.com.



TOY/COLLECTIBLE

LEGO AVENGERS QUINJET

OUT NOW

Other Lego Quinjets are available (well, if you can find them down the back of the internet), but this new model has some nifty points of difference. The detachable display stand, for starters, elevating it above other super-ships. Then there's the choice of two sticker sheets, so it can fly under the banner of S.H.I.E.L.D. or the Avengers. Wings are adjustable, undercarriage is retractable and there are five minifigures: Black Widow, Cap, Iron Man, Thor and Loki, rocking the sceptre from his ultra-naughty phase. Make a landing at lego.com.



ACCESSORIES

LUKE SKYWALKER MEDAL CEREMONY MINI-BACKPACK

OUT NOW

Luke's natty ensemble at the end of *Episode IV* is undoubtedly worth celebrating; after all, he makes a proper effort, whereas all Han does is do his top button up. Measuring 9 x 10.5 x 4.5in, this vegan-leather Loungefly mini-backpack features Luke's medal and belt buckle on the front and the Rebel starbird on the back (for more starbirds, plus bonus X-wings, see the printed lining). Matching wallet also available. Target your computer at funkoeurope.com.



GAME

THE TOP TRUMPS GUIDE TO ANIME MOVIES

OUT NOW

The perennial card game branches into Japanese animation, serving up 30 classics ranked across four categories: Year Released, Length, Awards and Cultural Impact. Each card also offers a few info-nuggets, so you can slyly pretend to have seen the ones still on your watchlist. Is your competitor's *Ghost In The Shell* about to be *Spirited Away* into your own hand? Or will your disastrous deck be saved by (the) *Belle*? Totter over to amazon.co.uk. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



FUNKO, LEGO, WINNING MOVIES, LOUNGEFLY

GAMES PREVIEW

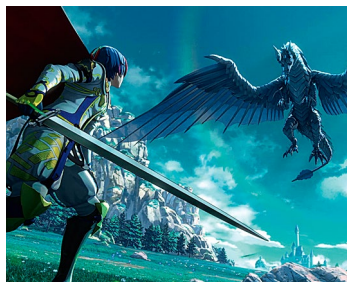
Level up your 2023 gaming with these titles...



RESIDENT EVIL 4

OUT 24 MARCH PC, PS4/5, XBOX SERIES

Shinji Mikami's action-horror masterpiece has been ported to every format under the sun since its 2005 release, but this lavish remake promises a more expansive overhaul. Capcom's modernisation offers a clear visual upgrade of the original game, bringing it in line with the recent remakes of 2 and 3, while refining the storyline and controls. There are some fresh additions to combat, too: protagonist Leon can now parry attacks, leading to the amusing/terrifying sight of a hand knife blocking a chainsaw's roaring blade.



FIRE EMBLEM: ENGAGE

OUT 20 JAN SWITCH

Just over 10 years ago, Nintendo's tactical RPG series seemed to be at death's door. But *Fire Emblem* has enjoyed a new lease of life since 2012's triumphant *Awakening*, and the latest game draws from its own history to fan-pleasing effect. Charged with taking down an ancient dragon, you'll need to gather up Emblem Rings to harness the powers of heroes past: an excuse for favourite characters from previous entries (including franchise figurehead Marth) to make a long-awaited comeback.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

OUT 12 MAY SWITCH

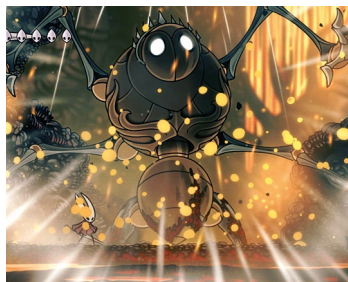
The first direct sequel in the series since 1987's *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, *Tears Of The Kingdom* is probably 2023's most-anticipated game, as both players and critics anxiously wait to see if Nintendo can possibly top its 2017 masterpiece *Breath Of The Wild*. It builds upon the same foundations: you'll roam Hyrule's blighted lands once more, but also explore an archipelago above the clouds, soaring between islands atop a giant stone bird in sequences that recall the much-maligned *Skyward Sword*.



WILD HEARTS

OUT 17 FEB PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES

Evidently, Electronic Arts has been watching the continued success of Capcom's *Monster Hunter* with envious eyes. This multiplayer beast-slaying RPG is cut from a very similar cloth – though *Dynasty Warriors* developer Omega Force has previous in this genre, having made the oft-overlooked *Toukiden* games. Set in feudal-era Japan, *Wild Hearts* pits four hunters against monsters known as Kemono – “a fusion of nature and animals”. You'll use authentic weaponry while building giant catapults and explosive traps to take down your colossal quarry.



HOLLOW KNIGHT: SILKSONG

OUT TBC PC, PS4/5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE/SERIES

Originally planned as a downloadable expansion of Team Cherry's acclaimed action-adventure, *Silksong* has evolved into a full-blown sequel, starring antagonist-turned-ally Hornet. A more capable combatant than the Knight, she's able to heal almost instantaneously with her supply of silk – which in turn has allowed her creators to make battles even more challenging than before. If the insectoid kingdom of Pharloom can match *Hollow Knight*'s Hallownest for atmosphere and intricacy, this could be a contender for 2023's best game.



WO LONG: FALLEN DYNASTY

OUT 3 MARCH PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES

The makers of *Nioh* return with a fantastical twist on Luo Guanzhong's 14th-century novel *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*, with your nameless warrior pitched into a world of martial arts and magic. Built around the Chinese philosophy of wuxing, it lets you choose between five elemental 'phases' – Fire, for example, grants you pyrokinetic powers, while Earth lets you cause ground-shattering quakes – and a divine familiar. Ranging from a majestic white battle tiger to a phoenix that scatters burning feathers, these should give you a fighting chance against the demonic hordes.



HYENAS

OUT TBC PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES

Early reports that the studio behind *Alien: Isolation* was making another sci-fi shooter set expectations that the Creative Assembly has clearly delighted in defying. *Hyenas* pits five crews of three against one another in chaotic zero-gravity heists, as they compete to plunder a billionaire's spaceship before protecting their haul while their teleporter warms up. There's a distinctly nostalgic spin to the swag: you're fighting to secure VHS tapes, vintage videogames and Rubik's Cubes, highly sought-after items in this far-flung future.



LIKE A DRAGON: ISHIN!

OUT 21 FEB PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES

The *Yakuza* franchise has now adopted the literal translation of its Japanese title (*Ryu Ga Gotoku*) and has three games in development; perhaps the most anticipated is this remake of a 2014 spin-off. Taking place in the 1860s during the Bakumatsu era, it casts you as real-world samurai Sakamoto Ryoma, who fought to abolish feudalism. Here, you enforce change via the sharp end of a katana, with Ryoma able to call upon subordinates to boost his skills.



FLINTLOCK: THE SIEGE OF DAWN

OUT TBC PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES

With development talent from Weta Digital and investment from publisher Kepler Interactive, New Zealand's A44 Games steps into the big leagues with its *Ashen* follow-up. Taking place in a fantasy world on the cusp of an industrial revolution, *FTSOD* follows explosives expert Nor and her mythical fox companion Enki as they tackle an undead army sent by the gods to punish humanity. They make a powerful team – Nor's hatchet and musket combine with Enki's spells in thrillingly expressive, dynamic combat.



DEAD ISLAND 2

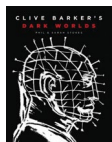
OUT 28 APRIL PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES

Like a particularly persistent zombie, this game simply refuses to die. Set in a quarantined Los Angeles – which, you might note, isn't an island at all – *Dead Island 2* has had bigger problems than a misleading title. Announced in 2014, it has since changed hands twice, passing from Yager to Sumo Digital, before present custodian Dambuster took over. If 'development hell' doesn't quite cover the game's rocky road to release, it's shaping up surprisingly well, with the first-person action setting grisly new standards for in-game gore.

CHRIS SCHILLING



From *Books Of Blood* to books sans Brad...



CLIVE BARKER'S DARK WORLDS
★★★★★

As guardians of Barker's archive, Phil and Sarah Stokes' access secures an impressively detailed Barkerpedia. Dutifully dissecting *Books Of Blood*, *Hellraiser* and freak-valentine *Cabal*, their well-stuffed tribute also unpeels the skin of his youth and early plays, where Faustian bargains meet forbidden delights. Barker's psychosexual artwork spills off the pages, all "sinews and blood". Meanwhile, stretches on Barker's Motörhead video and love of musical narrative offer proof of his vast creative appetite.

KEVIN HARLEY



BULLET TRAIN: THE ART AND MAKING OF THE FILM
★★★★★

For all their storyboards and behind-the-scenes pics, Making-Of books live or die on access. Buyers should be aware, then, that Brad Pitt apparently couldn't find time to chat to this one's author (Abbie Bernstein), leaving a (bullet) hole at the centre that its lavishly illustrated pages struggle to fill. Indeed, this particular tie-in is more notable for what it doesn't contain, with no reference to the movie's cameos or the fact Sandra Bullock replaced Lady Gaga. There's a lot about the train, though.

NEIL SMITH



BOOKS

STANLEY KUBRICK'S THE SHINING

★★★★★ LEE UNKRICH, J.W. RINZLER TASCHEN

Director Lee Unkrich has long been a *Shining* superfan, sneaking references into his Pixar movies (*Toy Story 3*, *Coco*). This mighty two-volume (plus 'ephemera') tome is a testament to his near-lifelong fascination. Forget Room 237-style theories; this is a meticulous Making Of, covering pre-production from when Stephen King's manuscript was still called *The Shine*, to the film's box-office reception, to the protracted shoot in between.

The granular detail is transportive: the way the book throws you into the specifics of the production makes it feel as if the over-schedule shoot might never be completed. Notes, annotated galleys and blueprints add to the immersion. Even devout

Shining nerds will find new trivia to glory in (Paul McCartney almost had to sublet a soundstage to the production), and there's a tangible sense of the awe and terror of working with a fastidious taskmaster like Stanley Kubrick.

Unkrich's research and interviews have been marshalled by the late, great J.W. Rinzler (whose *Star Wars* and *Aliens* companions are indispensable), and there's a wealth of unseen archive photography, much of it from actor Danny Lloyd's family.

This book won't be for everyone – it's a limited edition of 1,000 copies, and costs £1,500, available from 10 February – but it's hard to envision a more comprehensive guide. A work of obsession befitting both director and subject matter. **MATT MAYTUM**

BFI FILM CLASSICS: PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

★★★★★ ANNA BACKMAN
ROGERS BFI/BLOOMSBURY



Why does Peter Weir's 1975 Aussie drama still haunt us? Aesthetics professor Rogers' rigorous monograph uses feminist, Freudian and post-colonial tools to unpick *Picnic's* alluring push-pull of ambiguity/suggestion, showing how it encourages keen viewers to question the film's mediated images of femininity. Between the surfaces and secrets, she finds something subversive: a story about the horror of living under an imposed narrative. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BONG JOON-HO: DISSIDENT CINEMA

★★★★★ KAREN HAN ABRAMS



Famously giving witty and detailed assessments of his work in interviews, Bong Joon-ho is hardly a man of mystery. But Han's book digs further into the filmmaker's mind, analysing his features and shorts and interviewing key collaborators. Somewhere between a monograph and a coffee-table book, it boasts a David Lowery foreword and is packed with BTS stills and striking illustrations. But best of all, Han's writing is imbued with an infectious passion for the director's work. **LEILA LATIF**

CRAZY OLD LADIES: THE STORY OF HAG HORROR

★★★★★ CAROLINE YOUNG
BEARMANOR MEDIA



As stardom waned, a generation of actresses were given a chance to resuscitate their careers with so-called hag horror. Young's survey of the subgenre uses Bette Davis and Joan Crawford's frosty coupling in *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* as a springboard for a frisky yet thoughtful treatise on the limited choices facing Hollywood's older ladies that will have readers seeking out the likes of *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* and *Die! Die! My Darling!* **NEIL SMITH**

TOTAL EL BUENF

CINEMA CELEBRATES POSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO ZERO LEVELS...



IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH
BACK TO THE
FUTURE PART II



Q Towards the end of *Back To The Future Part II* a Western Union delivery man appears out of the rain in 1955 carrying a letter WU had been holding in their possession since 1885, addressed to Marty McFly. Does Western Union really have such a delivery service?

A Spokesperson for Western Union

Western Union was certainly around in 1885 when the film is set – we just celebrated 170 years of history last year. In 1856 the company became known as Western Union after changing its name from The New York And Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company, so Doc would have recognised the service in 1885. Back then, Western Union did run a telegram business. We don't any more, as this part of our business was sold in 2006. I stress that this was a telegram business, not a letter business – but of course, the mechanics could be the same.

It was possible back then to ask to deliver the telegram at a later date. Even now, on the website of the company that runs this in the US, this is mentioned as a possibility. So, in theory, someone could ask for post-dated delivery. Could this happen after 70 years? I guess you would have to convince the clerk back then!

VERDICT NOT BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies...
WITH ALPHANUMERIC TITLES



| | | |
|----|---|----------|
| 01 | MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA 2008 | \$603.9M |
| 02 | SE7EN 1995 | \$327.3M |
| 03 | TAK3N 2014 | \$326.5M |
| 04 | 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS 2003 | \$236.4M |
| 05 | SCRE4M 2011 | \$97.2M |
| 06 | THIR13EN GHOSTS 2001 | \$68.5M |
| 07 | SIMONE 2002 | \$19.6M |
| 08 | L4YER CAKE 2004 | \$11.9M |
| 09 | LILYA 4-EVER 2002 | \$1M |
| 10 | INTERSTELLA 5555: THE 5TORY OF THE 5ECRET 5TAR 5YSTEM 2003 | \$0.05M |

ON LOCATION

REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA



WHAT? Tilda Swinton's rock star recuperates in a beautiful house on the island of Pantelleria, until her peace is broken by Ralph Fiennes' ex in Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash*.

WHERE Dammuso Grande, Tenuta Borgia, Pantelleria, Italy
www.tenutaborgia.it/en/dammuso/tenuta

GO? Live it up in the largest house on the estate surrounded by olive groves, as used by Swinton's character. Sleeps eight – unless someone has a boozy accident in the swimming pool...

UNIVERSAL/OREAMWORKS

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

GUITARS IN MOVIES

Ace axes...



1

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Marty McFly shows the kids at the 1955 Enchantment Under the Sea dance what rock 'n' roll is really all about with a revved-up rendition of Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode'. He twangs a Gibson ES-345 that was only released in 1958. Time-travel guitar, too...



2

DELIVERANCE

Yeah, the hick kid plays a banjo but Ronny Cox's weekender, on an ill-fated canoe trip with the lads, meets him note for note on an acoustic guitar. The resulting 'duelling banjos' tune plays in anyone's head when they find themselves somewhere unwelcoming.



3

ELVIS

Anxious Elvis Presley pauses on-stage when making his debut on the *Louisiana Hayride*. A jeer in the silence spurs him on to unleash rock 'n' roll hip-swivelling on the audience – his moves playing teen girls as surely as his pick plucks his strings.



4

THIS IS SPINAL TAP

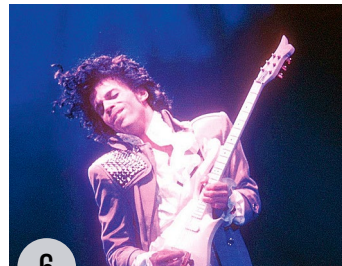
Rock star Nigel Tufnel's guitar room is a place where he plays and cherishes his axes. None more so than one that no one can touch, plus a favourite that he challenges the director of this mockumentary to listen to without playing. That's the sustain...



5

THE RUNAWAYS

LA rockers The Runaways belt out 'Cherry Bomb' with aplomb as they climb to stardom. Joan Jett (Kristen Stewart) shines as she shreds her guitar playing that famous lick and wearing a red PVC jumpsuit and a DGAF attitude. "Get down, ladies, you got nothin' to lose..."



6

PURPLE RAIN

Prince, resplendent in ruffles, busts out his instrument to wow a nightclub audience with a rendition of the title song, complete with an emotionally charged, searing guitar solo. He's so spent at the end he can only manage to stagger off stage.



7

SCHOOL OF ROCK

Rock nerd Dewey Finn finds his calling when he becomes an accidental sub teacher and schools his nipper students in the art of the gee-tar. With the aid of his trusty Gibson SG Standard, Finn expands his class' musical horizons as well as his own.



8

CROSSROADS

None more '80s than this fret-fiddling guitar duel in a Ralph Macchio vehicle, as the Karate Kid trades licks with corporate axe whore Jack Butler (Steve Vai). Spoiler, it's Vai playing both guitar parts – including Paganini's '5th Caprice'; Ralph is miming.



9

AIRPLANE!

A cheery air steward wreaks comedic havoc with an acoustic guitar as she passes down the aisle, whacks passengers and leaves a stretchered girl convulsing when her peppy performance of Peter, Paul and Mary's 'River Of Jordan' rips out her drip. Nurse!



10

COCO

Miguel idolises his dead relative – a skilled mariachi player – but is forbidden from playing music by his fam. But his secret skills come into their own when he's trapped in the afterworld with the dead and plucks their hearts with 'Remember Me'. Sob. **JANE CROWTHER**

Did we miss something? Let us know on [Twitter](#) @totalfilm



HINDSIGHT CORNER

JENNIFER LAWRENCE

PASSENGERS (2016)

December 2016

“Performance wise, I was really excited – there’s a lot of really powerful stuff that my character goes through.”

November 2022

“Adele told me not to do it! She was like, ‘I feel like space movies are the new vampire movies.’ I should have listened to her.”

PLAIN TALKING

THIS MONTH CHIPPY

Not to be confused with a purveyor of deep-fried foods, a chippy is on-set lingo for a carpenter. The worker bees of the production design department.



FLOP CULTURE



DICK TRACY

Warren Beatty's comic-strip adaptation is virtually forgotten nowadays. Did Batman's success create false hopes for the 1990 film?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Star/director Warren Beatty's revival of Chester Gould's '30s private dick arrived filled to the fedora with promise. Between Beatty's lead, *Top Gun*'s writers (Jim Cash, Jack Epps Jr.), Madonna, the songs, the rogues' gallery of co-stars and the many merch tie-ins, *Batman*-scale returns surely beckoned.

What went wrong?

While *Tracy*'s box office seems solid, the gap between expectation and reality is the measure of its misfire. Disney wanted *Bat*-sized business, going by the synergetic merch overload. But a budget that near-doubled from \$25m to \$46m under Beatty's fastidious watch, then doubled again after marketing, left little change after receipts were counted. Meanwhile, the film generated gossip when Sean Young was sacked. She alleged that she spurned Beatty's advances, which he denied. Some preview audiences questioned Beatty's casting suitability – a 53-year-old man drooled over by a Madonna 20 years his junior. After 1987 flop *Ishtar*, perhaps he wasn't the right hot name for target audiences either, an issue given *Tracy*'s lack of iconic stature. The film featured many other stars as villains, but they

vanished under striking prosthetics and lacked breathing room as characters. Even Al Pacino's SHOUTING couldn't fix the problem. Unclear who this diffuse film was for, Disney distributed it with a Roger Rabbit cartoon, a clash with Madonna's laboured innuendos. Factor in the primary-coloured comic-book aesthetic and you have a film of many distinct elements, few of which cohered convincingly.

Redeeming feature

Richard Sylbert and Rick Simpson's Deco-noir designs and one of Stephen Sondheim's frisky songs banked deserved Oscars. Danny Elfman's romantic score swoons, too.

What happened next?

Although some critics see *Tracy*'s influence on *Sin City* and Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, cult reclamation has eluded the film. Beatty talked about a sequel as recently as 2016, but where's the audience?

Should it be remade?

Rebooted possibly. The legal rights to the character may once have been an obstacle. Sooner or later, though, the reimagination market always gets its man. **KEVIN HARLEY**

| BUDGET | BOX OFFICE | AWARDS | TF STAR RATING | ROTTEN TOMATOES |
|--------|------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| \$46m | \$162.7m | 9 | ★★★ | 63% |



IS IT JUST ME OR SHOULD PATRICK SWAYZE HAVE BEEN A MEGASTAR?



MATT GLASBY
@MATTGLASBY

Handsome, charismatic and by all accounts nice, Patrick Wayne Swayze (1952–2009) – Buddy to his friends – was a rare talent.

But just quite how rare has only become apparent in retrospect.

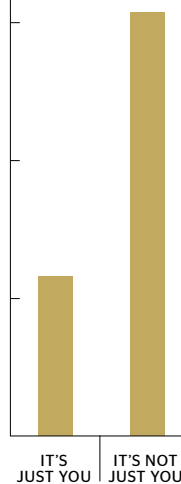
As well as being an excellent actor – not always a requirement – he was a true renaissance man. He could sing and write songs ('She's Like The Wind' reached No.3 in the US), dance (both ballet and dirty), surf, ice-skate, do martial arts, ride horses and fly planes.

This versatility translated to the screen, where he convinced as a romantic lead (*Ghost*), an action star (*Point Break*), even a throat-ripping,

philosophy-studying bouncer (*Road House*) – all while maintaining a layer of vulnerability. Unusually for the era, there was something malleable in Swayze's maleness. He seemed just as comfortable playing a World War III guerilla warrior (*Red Dawn*) as he did doing drag (*To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything! Julie Newmar*). The fact that he often played the object of lust/idealisation while someone else was the hero might have stopped him being taken more seriously, but it's crucial to his enduring appeal. To be that object without unbalancing the films required self-awareness and generosity.

Although he clearly had his troubles – most involving alcohol, plane crashes or some terrible combination of the two – Swayze always seemed an advocate. While the other male stars of the era

OFFICE-OMETER
THE TF STAFF
VERDICT IS IN!



were making films that endorsed toxic masculinity (hello, *Cocktail*!) or childishness (*Big*), Swayze was making *Dirty Dancing*, a pro-choice drama that seems more and more extraordinary with each passing year.

Although he made some poor decisions in later life (*Christmas In Wonderland*, anyone?), Swayze kept taking risks. *Donnie Darko* saw him playing a paedophile, a role it's hard to imagine either of the Toms fighting over.

Since his death from pancreatic cancer in 2009, Swayze's films have undergone critical re-evaluation, so perhaps it's time his performances did, too. Nobody put Buddy in the corner, but we should have put him on a pedestal. Or is it just me?

Share your reaction at [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://www.gamesradar.com/) or on Facebook and Twitter.



LAST TIME IS THE BATMAN A BAD DETECTIVE?

Cody Adams
Whaaat?!? He's by far the most 'detective' of the modern film Bats!

Dakota Flippo
Did you not realise he's only been

Batman for two years? At least he actually used his detective skills.

Donald Styer
He just happens to be facing an adversary much smarter than him.

Grant Smith
He never really figures anything out.

All Huqq
Terrible detective and fighter. Man got hit by every bullet that exited a gun.

THERE WILL BE BLOOD'S OIL FIRE

Let's just light it up and go for it," said Paul Thomas Anderson when planning the extraordinary scene in which an oil derrick goes up in flames in his 2007 picture. In deciding to save money by constructing the derrick from wood, not steel, it meant that Anderson and DOP Robert Elswit would have one shot at capturing the action. But they agreed that guerrilla shooting was the way to go.

The scene marks a pivotal moment in *There Will Be Blood*. First, a jet of gas and water knocks HW (Dillon Freasier), the young son of Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis), from the roof of the derrick, robbing him of his hearing for life. Then black gold erupts from the ground to signal that Plainview's ambitions are about to be met. OK, so the oil

catches fire and burns into the night until the derrick collapses, but neither that nor HW's trauma can extinguish Plainview's joy as he realises that he sits upon an ocean of oil. Furthermore, the scene intensifies the battle between Eli (Paul Dano) and Plainview, religion and capitalism, for the oilman snubbed the preacher's offer to bless the well. Is this tower of fire a manifestation of God's wrath?

Special-effects supervisor Steve Cremin had previously overseen the burning oil wells in Sam Mendes' Gulf War drama *Jarhead*. For *There Will Be Blood*, he explained, "We used petroleum products, diesel fuel and gasoline... We made our own jet nozzle to shoot the juice through... high-pressure petroleum transfer pumps that do a huge volume at huge pressure." Anderson continued to shoot as

night fell, though Cremin warned the derrick would collapse at any second. "Finally he said, 'OK, drop it'," added Cremin. "We had the derrick hooked up to a crane with a couple of cables that allowed us to pull a weak-knee out from under it. It dropped like a dream."

Naturally, they had to avoid environmental damage. Petroleum was not allowed to hit the ground, or else be viewed as a toxic spill, and clean soil samples were afterwards produced within a 150-foot radius. But the billowing black smoke did cause damage to *No Country For Old Men*. Shooting a few miles away, the Coens' film was temporarily halted, though the brothers got their own back by pipping *There Will Be Blood* to Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Picture at the Academy Awards. **JAMIE GRAHAM**





BEHIND THE SCENES

GIVING CREDIT

Saluting the behind-the-scenes talent making movie magic.

KAREN KRIZANOVICH RESEARCHER

Karen Krizanovich is a film journalist who has worn a number of different hats. She has been a runner and short-film producer as well as working in production clearance and as a co-ordinator (set decoration/art department) on film sets. Now she does one of “the rarest and best” of jobs as a researcher. “People don’t realise they need a researcher until the last minute. Most of the time, they’ll do it themselves, or ask an assistant or partner to do it. A lot of smaller films or films that have been in development for a long time won’t use one at all.”

How would you describe your role in simple terms?

I supply ideas, physical references and imagery for the film’s production design. You have to think like a designer. What would spark ideas and not waste time? It’s about streamlining the finer details of any set build or design. It is not creative. It is about supplying inspiration.

How did you get started?

After producing some short films, I badgered a production manager for two years to give me a chance at being a runner in her production office on a small UK feature. She fired me, ultimately. But I was lucky enough to be given another chance, this time to be a buyer on a small TV series – that involved things I’d

never even thought of. That job led to research, uncredited, on a very large and notable film’s art department, which is one of the largest departments in major feature films. That was pretty scary.

What’s the biggest misconception about your work/department?
That’s it all googling.

What’s the best thing about your job?
The work is fascinating. I love being in the office or being away doing primary research. It’s long hours and pressure. Reminds me of journalism, actually.

What’s the worst thing?
Failing to find the right thing.

What have you worked on?
Everyone in the industry says this but I really am lucky to work with people who are immensely talented and good-humoured. That’s a real thrill. I’ve worked on about 30 different productions of various sorts but you may have seen *Gravity*, *Red Dwarf*, *The Conjuring 2*, *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*, *The Old Guard*, *Venom: Let There Be Carnage*, *Wednesday* and some that are coming soon such as *Luther*, among others. I’ve worked with great art directors, supervising art directors and production designers. Every one teaches me something. As for credits, well, my name isn’t always seen on



BEHIND THE SCENES

The art team on TV series 24: Live Another Day.

‘You have to think like a designer. What would spark ideas and not waste time?’

the end credit scroll but you’ll see it where it counts: on the crew list.

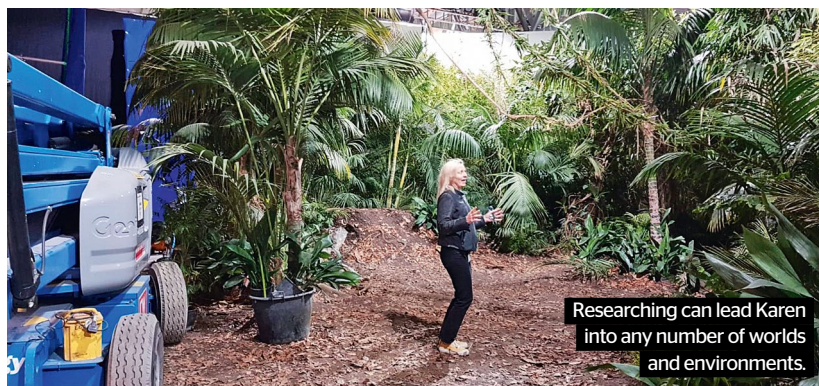
What do you need to do your job?

A researcher needs to think like an art director or production designer. You might be working with set dec or concept artists, too, and their requirements can be quite different. The hours are long – it’s not unusual to share a very long day with everyone else in the art department. You need to be punctual. You need to be able to drive. You need to learn new technologies and software all the time. Data wrangling and aspects of copyright also help. Also, a request means now, as in now now.

Most memorable moments on film?

Being told by an art director that a hero prop, mentioned in the script, that was supposed to have nuclear codes was going to be a close-up. That meant the codes would be in shot. I said, “But it doesn’t say that in the script.” He said, “It will with the next rewrite.” I scrambled. Through a circuitous series of contacts, I ended up phoning a man at a pub at a certain time. I still don’t know who he was. So, I got the codes. They were real codes – I checked the format – but old ones, so don’t worry. And yes, they were in shot. **JANE CROWTHER**

KAREN KRIZANOVICH



Researching can lead Karen into any number of worlds and environments.

TOTAL
FILM

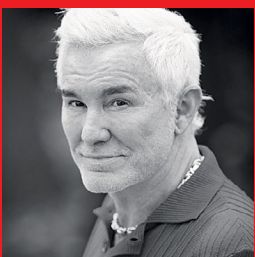
THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

PODCAST

IT'S YOUR **LAST TIME**
AT THE CINEMA

WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

JOIN OUR CELEBRITY PROJECTIONISTS...



Baz Luhrmann



Noomi Rapace



Robert Eggers



Aimee Lou Wood



Joe Wright

INTERMISSION

A WRITER TAKES PAUSE TO CONSIDER....

Manic Pixie Dream Girls



LEILA LATIF
@LEILA_LATIF

My day started typically enough for a film journalist: quietly eating a Pret breakfast sandwich in front of some experimental Cornish folk horror in a Soho screening room. I was exhausted, but I dashed out as soon as the credits rolled and ran to a doctor's appointment I'd been desperately looking forward to. Finally, I hoped, I was going to get help with my insomnia! I was going to be well-rested for the first time in... well, possibly for the first time.

I sat in the office of a lovely and engaged psychiatrist, but some of his questions were as strange as the film I'd just watched. Do you check chapter lengths when reading? Do you love Diet Coke? Are you a perfectionist who makes careless spelling and grammar mistakes (apologies to my *TF* editors for that one)? Do you get angry if bored? The answer was "yes" to all the above, but I was confused; what did this have to do with sleep?

Two hours and an overflowing bin of tear-soaked tissues later, the doctor paused and gently said, "Leila, I've got some news, and I don't want you to freak out." I sat, paralysed by terror, trying to remember if I'd ever read about a terminal case of insomnia, before he continued. "You've got ADHD."

I left with armfuls of reading on how attention deficit hyperactivity disorder manifests in women and returned to Soho to review an avant-garde documentary about laparoscopic surgery. While I stared at the screen, watching a brain sliced open, it slowly sank in what was wrong with my own.

As anyone who has dealt with getting treatment for mental health knows, there was a long road ahead, and in the interim

it was down to me to keep my spirits up. Naturally, as a film obsessive (FYI, intensely connecting to art is a symptom of ADHD), I leaned into artful "feel-good" movies and queued up *Almost Famous*, *The Apartment*, *500 Days of Summer*, *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *Garden State* and *The Accidental Tourist*.

But while these charming comedies were my emotional safety net, they have occasionally been dismissed as male fantasies filled with "Manic Pixie Dream Girls".

'Credit goes to Kate Hudson, Kate Winslet and Shirley MacLaine for being messy, sensitive and impulsive'

Critic Nathan Rabin coined the term after watching the film *Elizabethtown* for female characters who "exist solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures". He has since disavowed it as sexist and reductive. Still, there is some substance to the trope, and a plethora of idiosyncratic female characters emerged in the noughties, filling the screen with roaring emotions and tender sensitivities. "Sure," I thought to myself while rewatching *Almost Famous*, "technically, Penny Lane et al have a tendency to impulsively upend their lives in the service of others, but who among us hasn't?"

In that moment, it dawned on me, and I began frantically texting my friend Lara who was also working

on getting treatment for ADHD and came of age alongside me at the peak of quirky cinematic heroines. "Yes," she agreed, "I think all Manic Pixie Dream Girls have ADHD. They took our neurological disorder, made it cutesy, and had it save Orlando Bloom while glossing over how distressing it is to never know where your keys are."

Lara and I met as "gifted" 12-year-olds, and both ended up with loving families, careers we were proud of, and reputations as the life and soul of the party. But we were also perpetually on the edge of burn-out and struggling to stave off despair. Outwardly, life looked perfect, but privately we shared that, deep in our bones, something was "wrong" with us. Yet, growing up, films assured us that this emotionally unpredictable existence was adorable.

Having my occasionally debilitating neurodiversity reflected back at me as "charming" means I'm still trying to distinguish strengths from symptoms. But there's a considerable amount of gratitude I have for "Manic Pixie Dream Girls". Women with ADHD often have low self-esteem and dysfunctional romantic relationships, yet I've always basically liked myself and only coupled up with men who were kind to me. I'm sure the reasons for this are endlessly complex but part of the credit goes to Kate Hudson, Kate Winslet and Shirley MacLaine for being messy, sensitive and impulsive in films that held them to be deserving of happily-ever-afters.

So now, when I watch "Manic Pixie Dream Girls", my feelings have changed. I see myself in their spontaneity and how they feel with their entire being, even if that is occasionally to their detriment. But having got the help that I need, I also want to reach through the screen and give them a hug. To let them know that they are wonderful women that enrich the world and then gently whisper, "I've got some news, and I don't want you to freak out."



THE MUPPETS

The power of the frog...

OPEN SESAME STREET

"It doesn't mean anything – I made it up," Jim Henson once said of the word 'Muppet'. The Muppets' identity did indeed seem flexible initially, as Henson and wife-to-be Jane Nebel developed prototypes for '50s sketch show *Sam And Friends*. Talk-show slots and adverts followed, while a beige Kermit predecessor was made from Henson's mother's coat. In the '60s, Frank Oz joined Henson and Children's Television Workshop edu-show *Sesame Street* beckoned.

LIGHTING THE LIGHTS

The Muppets weren't quite themselves in the early '70s, as early pilots (witness *The Muppet Show: Sex And Violence*) suggested. Brit-media proprietor Lew Grade's interest galvanised 1976's *The Muppet Show*, which launched as a variety-style melee of star guests, gags, songs and show-within-a-show mischief. Backstage elements involved Kermit's struggles with his co-stars' egos – enter Miss Piggy. Straddling satire and sincerity, insanity and inter-species love, the Muppets became massive.



MOVIE MUPPETMANIA

When *The Muppet Show* closed in 1981 after five seasons, a relocation was happening. *The Muppet Movie* arrived in 1979, followed by *The Great Muppet Caper* and *The Muppets Take Manhattan*, which inspired animated spin-off *Muppet Babies*. Variations on the Muppets' origins were a story feature, while Oscar nominations were banked. Henson diversified with *The Dark Crystal* and *Fraggle Rock*, and Disney's interest in the Muppets' rights slowly heated up.

THE MUPPETS TAKE DISNEY

When Henson died aged just 53 in 1990, the Muppets/Disney merger had begun its slow arc to completion. Disney had licensing agreements and production credits on Muppets films, from glorious (...*Christmas Carol*) to exhausted (...*From Space*). *Muppets Tonight* aired on ABC/the Disney Channel from 1996–8 (meet David Hoggselhoff!), but it wasn't until 2004 that Disney acquired the IP and began making mixed-bag shows/specials such as *The Muppets' Wizard Of Oz*.

MODERN MUPPETS

In 2011, Oscar-winning movie *The Muppets* revived affection. After sequel *Most Wanted* struggled, however, upheavals ensued. Voice actors changed and a 2015 Muppets frog-umentary series proved short-lived. Disney+'s *Muppets Now* revived a sketch-based format and *Muppets Haunted Mansion* was guardedly welcomed, but the backstage element remained absent. Meanwhile, live shows confirmed the Muppets' enduring popularity. Might upcoming show *The Muppets Mayhem* light the felt folks' lights again? **KEVIN HARLEY**

KEY MOVIES



THE MUPPET MOVIE 1979

★★★★★

Make that 'Rainbow Connection': the Muppets' signature song graces a wide-eyed Hollywood road movie of great surreal charm. "Keep believing..."



THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN 1984

★★★★★

This fizzy backstage romp doesn't get old: pre-*Ratatouille* diner rats, 'Together Again', and singing chickens.



THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL 1992

★★★★★

Michael Caine's Scrooge and the ditties spawn a heartwarming movie, directed by Brian Henson after his father's death.



THE MUPPETS 2011

★★★★★

Co-writer/star Jason Segel and songman Bret McKenzie's revival movie honoured the Muppets' virtues: cameos, kindness, comedy tunes.

NAME THE FRAME

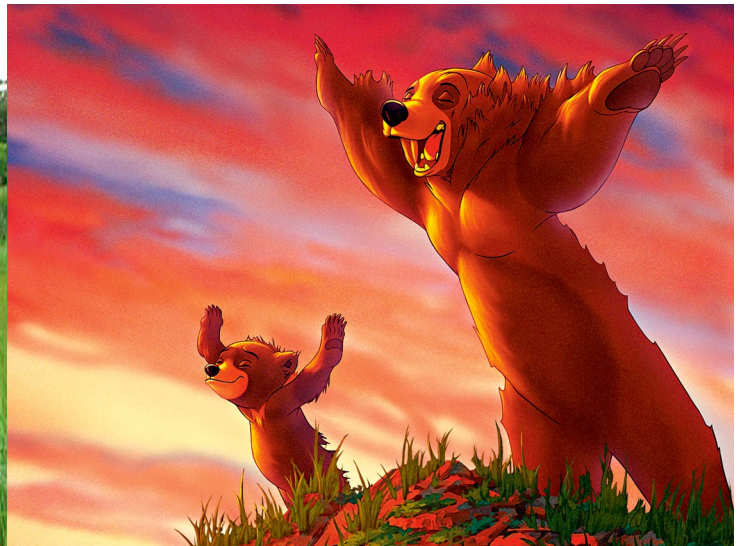
Can you guess these eight cocaine-fuelled scenes?



ANSWERS: 1. BLOW 2. THE WOLF OF WALL STREET 3. GOODFELLAS 4. BOOGIE NIGHTS 5. IN BRUGES 6. SCARFACE 7. AMERICAN MADE 8. HORRIBLE BOSSES

BEARS

Want to test your movie knowledge? Ursine right here!



EASY

- 1 Which animated hit was originally titled *The Bear And The Bow*?
- 2 Which big birthday is Aunt Lucy celebrating in *Paddington 2*?
- 3 Name the bear enthusiast at the centre of 2005's *Grizzly Man*.
- 4 In which comic-book movie do the heroes confront a Demon Bear?
- 5 Stuntman Glenn Ennis – who mo-capped *The Revenant*'s bear – is a former what?
a) astronaut; b) zookeeper; c) rugby player.

MEDIUM

- 1 Which 2010 movie bore the infamous tagline 'Great things come in bears'?
- 2 In which two movies did Bart the Bear co-star with Anthony Hopkins?
- 3 Disney's first feature-length Winnie The Pooh movie was released in which year?
- 4 Name the movie in which Brendan Fraser is harassed in a portaloos by a grizzly bear.
- 5 Which *Predator* actor made his debut in 1979 mutant-bear shocker *Prophecy*?

HARD

- 1 The first *Ted* film received an Original Song Oscar nom for which ditty?
- 2 What surname does Ted adopt at the end of *Ted 2*?
- 3 Christopher Walken 'earned' his first-ever Razzie nod for which furry (mis)adventure?
- 4 Joaquin Phoenix bequeathed the role of Kenai to which actor in *Brother Bear 2*?
- 5 Complete the titles: a) *The ___ Of The ___ Bear* (1986); b) *Two ___ And A Bear* (2016); c) *___ Bear* (2017, with Mark Hamill)

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.



@totalfilm.com twitter.com/totalfilm facebook.com totalfilm totalfilm@futurenet.com

★ STAR LETTER

I'm morally conflicted over the 'cinema vs streaming' debate. I love going to the cinema and don't like seeing major movies (eg *Glass Onion*) become available on streaming with a very limited cinema release. However, with life being so busy I don't always get the chance to go to the cinema, meaning I miss out on films like *Amsterdam* and *The Banshees Of Inisherin*, so I'm relieved to see them on Disney+... but then I feel bad that I didn't make the effort to see them in the cinema, then relieved I'm seeing them, then bad, then... and so on and so forth. Any solutions?

TOM ELLIS, VIA EMAIL



You're surely not the only one caught on the horns – or Hahns, since we're talking *Glass Onion* – of this dilemma. Our advice would be to support your local picture house where you can, but above all to keep watching movies by any (legal) means necessary. Tom and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Clerks III*, out now on digital, Blu-ray and DVD via Lionsgate Home Entertainment. Didn't send an address? Email it! Don't be silent, bub.

DARK MAGIC

I think the three-season mystery-thriller *Dark* showing on Netflix is outstanding. It is unlike anything I have ever seen and though it's hard to follow at times, it is completely and utterly engrossing from start to finish. This really is one of the best things I have seen on Netflix and recommend the series to everyone.

SUE CAWTE, ILFORD

Thanks for highlighting that one Sue, and do keep those recommendations coming (that goes for all of you, beloved readership). Obviously



Benoit Blanc looks very disappointed in you, Tom Ellis.



@BigLeeroy80

[on *Wonder Woman 3's* cancellation]

"Good. Don't make too many. Only a handful of Marvel movies after [the first] Avengers were any good in my opinion."

we do strive at TF Towers to see everything, everywhere, all at once. But occasionally it can be more like half of this thing, half of that thing, here and there, all on 2x speed...

STOP TEASING

Re: films that teased sequels that never happened [see Dialogue, TF329]. A few I can think of are 1987's *Masters Of The Universe* (Skeletor's "I'll be back!"), 2017's *The Mummy* (falling at the first hurdle in its attempts to start a shared universe), *Brightburn*, *Conan The Barbarian* (with Jason Momoa) and *John Carter*. It seems like it's a common thing to tease a follow-up that due to 'reasons' never gets made. What is more bewildering is when there are rumours (*Gladiator 2*) or actual instances

(*Independence Day: Resurgence*) of sequels that aren't warranted, given that the originals ended succinctly or with a 'happily ever after'.

S.P., ST. ALBANS

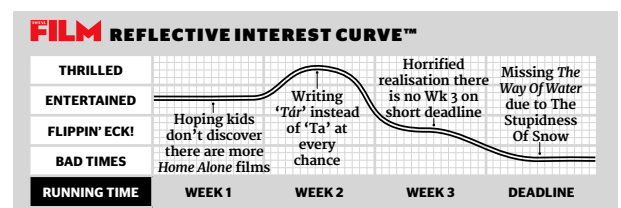
Hard agree re: *Resurgence*; the tagline should've been "This time it's (un)war(ranted)". As streaming thrives, we likely will see more of those follow-ons answering all the questions no one could be bothered to ask. *I Now Annul You Chuck & Larry*, anyone? *Dante's Peak District*? *Eat Pray Love Rinse Repeat*?

'AAL FIRED UP

Ever since I saw him in *Donnie Darko*, I've loved Jake Gyllenhaal. But in recent movies he's started to become

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Our review of 2022 with Austin Butler, Joseph Kosinski and Dan Erickson! GDT talks *Pinocchio*! David Harbour talks *Santal*! We discuss bats, sports movies and toilet breaks! Plus reviews and more... every week!



GROUP EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JANE CROWTHER

jane.crowther@futurenet.com

@totalfilm_jane

DEPUTY EDITOR MATT MAYTUM

matt.maytum@futurenet.com @mattmaytum

REVIEWS EDITOR MATTHEW LEYLAND

matthew.leyland@futurenet.com @totalfilm_matt

NEWS EDITOR JORDAN FARLEY

jordan.farley@futurenet.com @jordanfarley

ART EDITOR MIKE BRENNAN

mike.brennan@futurenet.com @mike_brennan01

FILM GROUP

Editor (SFX) Darren Scott **Art Editor** Jonathan Coates
Deputy Editor Ian Berriman **Production Editor** Ed Ricketts

CONTRIBUTORS

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham

Art studio Catherine Kirkpatrick

Prepress and cover manipulation Gary Stuckey

Hollywood Correspondent Adam Tanswell

Contributing Editors Kevin Harley, Lella Latif, James Mottram, Neil Smith, Paul Bradshaw

Contributors Simon Bland, Tom Dawson, Richard Edwards, Matt Glasby, Joel Harley, Matt Looker,

Libby Plummer, Rafa Sales Ross, Chris Schilling, Kate Stables, Gabriel Tate, Anton van Beek

Senior Entertainment Editor, Gamesradar+ Jack Shepherd - jack.shepherd@futurenet.com

Senior Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Bradley Russell

Senior Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Lauren Millic

Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Molly Edwards

Photography Alamy, August, Getty, Sir David-Simon Dayan, Shutterstock

Thanks to Nick Chen, Roy Delaney, Rhian Drinkwater, Ian Farrington, Matt Yates (Production)

Cover image Netflix

ADVERTISING

Media packs are available on request. Please contact Chris Mitchell.

Commercial Director Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com

Advertising Manager Chris Mitchell chris.mitchell@futurenet.com

Account Manager, Gaming & Film Nick Hayes nick.hayes@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING

Total Film is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at www.futurecontenthub.com

Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK orders and enquiries 0844 848 2852; overseas orders & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251045

Online enquiries www.magazinesdirect.co.uk Email totalfilm@magazinesdirect.co.uk

Total Film, (ISSN 1366-3135 USPS 23870), is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. The US annual subscription price is \$168.87. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn Brooklyn NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Total Film, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc., 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.

MARKETING AND CIRCULATION

Global Trade Marketing Director Victoria Chappell

Head of Subscriptions Sharon Todd

Direct Marketing Campaign Manager William Hardy

Newstrade Director Ben Oakden

PRINT, PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Production Manager Frances Twentyman

Head of Production, UK & US Mark Constance

Production Project Manager Clare Scott

Senior Ad Production Manager Jo Crosby

Ad Production Coordinator Emma Thomas

Digital Editions Controller Jason Hudson

Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons, on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU.

Tel: 0203 787 9001

MANAGEMENT

Managing Director, TV & Film Matthew Pierce

Content Director, Games & Film Daniel Dawkins

Head of Art & Design Rodney Dive

Director of Group Finance Oli Foster

All contents © 2023 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

ISSN Total Film 1366-3135

We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site. We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.



27556 (Jan-Dec 2023)
18,483 Print
8,673 Digital



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive Chairman Richard Huntingford
Chief Financial Officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE TOTAL FILM OFFICE THIS MONTH...

"Can we discuss how you've confused

Hillary Clinton with Paris Hilton?*

"Overheard at screening: 'Well, you had to suspend disbelief somewhat...' The film? **Pinocchio.**"



@dgl_thrawn

[Making an old time telephone gag...]

"Indiana Jones And The Dial Of Destiny? Hopefully it's not a wrong number."

a bit, I don't know how to say it, other than... his guitar amp seems permanently set to 11!? You know that point where an actor becomes a performer? I fear we're going into Nic Cage or maybe KAJE Gyllenhaal territory... geddit? I know he's a 'massive talent' but let's hope he doesn't become 'unbearable'!

ELLIE PA-HA, VIA EMAIL

Well, it's if *Ambulance* you're referring to, you can't really blame Mr. G for wanting to make himself heard over the sound of Michael Bay's direction. As for *Strange World*, maybe he should've cranked that amp to offset the lack of genuine strangeness. Kids and parents getting on each other's wicks on a long journey with loads of hold-ups? In *Dialogue's* house, that's called 'half-term'.

FEATHER REGIONS

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever: brill. Wings on feet: bad.

A. HANNA, PORTADOWN



He's got big pointy ears, so why not winged feet?

Quite possibly the most concise review ever to feature in this magazine. Well, aside from when we had our *Two-Word Review* section ("Babe: porker corker"). Sorry that the ankles rankled, A. You can see why the filmmakers wanted to include them as a nod to Namor's long-standing (ahem) comic-book iconograph-feet (sorry). Although we did at times worry that the feathery flapping might attract some confused Quidditch players.

DEEP DIVE

The football World Cup brought havoc to my efforts to watch at least one film a day. But I did manage to discover a gem from 1996 I wanted to share. It's called *Kondom Des Grauens*, which is German for *Killer Condom*. Should be total shit, right? [Arnie accent] ... WRONG! Damn this was a fun movie! Plays things straight, no matter how ridiculous the latex murderers are! It's a must-watch. And surprisingly progressive for a mid-'90s relic. Don't think twice - slip this one on!

JOHNNY YEWSEY, HAMPSHIRE

Astonishingly, that's one we haven't, um, come across. Less astonishingly, it was distributed in the US by Troma Entertainment ("Of course," says the trailer voiceover). Another fun fact we've learned: H.R. Giger served as creative consultant. After the previous year's boffing-and-offing epic *Species*, he was clearly on a roll.

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)



—
SPOILER
ALERT!
—

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **BLACK ADAM**

FADE IN:

EXT: KAHNDAQ, 5,000 YEARS AGO

A tyrannical king enslaves his people so he can make a magic demon crown. A young boy revolts and is given incredible superpowers by wizards. He immediately dies.

EXT: KAHNDAQ RUINS, PRESENT DAY

Archaeologist SARAH SHAHI scours the rubble with her loyal crew, including blatantly obvious baddie MARWAN KENZARI.

SARAH SHAHI

When we find the magic demon crown that's been lost for thousands of years, we should hide it again. No one should have that much power.

MARWAN KENZARI

So... shouldn't we just leave it and go home?

They find it anyway. Some bad guys – working with MARWAN, surprise! – ambush them. Luckily, SARAH SHAHI somehow summons ROCK ADAM.

THE AUDIENCE

She said, "Shazam"! I loved that film!
Oh this is going to be fun!

ROCK ADAM murders all the bad guys in unnecessarily brutal and bloody ways.

THE AUDIENCE

Oh.

INT: JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA HQ

VIOLA DAVIS contacts ALDIS HODGE, because who knows what's happening with the Justice League? He recruits DC's versions of Doctor Strange, Ant-Man and Storm.

ALDIS HODGE

Stop! Even though the people you killed were evil terrorists, killing is bad so you're a villain.

They fight for a long time until ROCK ADAM flies back to the ruins for a sulk.

SARAH SHAHI

By the way, I gave the magic demon crown to my teenage son, Bodhi Sabongui. It's probably safe.

INT: SARAH SHAHI'S HOME

MARWAN kidnaps BODHI. ROCK ADAM and the JSA find the crown anyway but then decide to trade it for BODHI despite it being all-powerfully evil.

DR. PIERCE BROSNAN

By the way, Aldis, I keep having a premonition about your death. It's fate, I'm afraid. There's no stopping it.

ALDIS HODGE

Oh no! And there's nothing I can do? Oh well, let's go confront this violent maniac and his gang of hired killers.

INT: MARWAN'S HIDEOUT

They all meet with MARWAN and immediately give him the crown. He obviously just betrays them and tries to shoot BODHI anyway.

MARWAN KENZARI

Ha ha! I'm actually the direct descendant of the tyrannical king from 5,000 years ago! Nothing can stop me now!

ROCK ADAM kills him. However, he loses control of his powers and nearly kills everyone else in the process. He flies back to the ruins to sulk again.

ROCK ADAM

I'm not who you think I am. It was actually my son who was the hero 5,000 years ago, but he gave me

his powers once and was immediately killed. My backstory is actually quite tragic.

ALDIS HODGE

Sure. Now let's lock you up in our underwater prison.

EXT: CENTRAL KAHNDAQ

MARWAN is reborn as a giant demon monster. He raises the dead, but BODHI rallies the locals to fight them, which they do easily.

ALDIS HODGE

Let's go defeat this evil guy, then. Sigh, I suppose this will be how I die.

DR. PIERCE BROSNAN

Ah, actually, no. I realised I can prevent your death by sacrificing myself. So that's the new fate... which contradicts the idea of 'fate'.

He uses astral projection to fight the monster and dies, but not before somehow releasing ROCK ADAM from prison. He arrives and helps ALDIS HODGE save the day.

ROCK ADAM

See? I am a hero! I just helped you defeat that massive evil demon!

ALDIS HODGE

Yes, but it was mostly me so the jury's still out. But you can stay here and protect Kahndaq. We obviously don't really care about it anyway.

INT: KAHNDAQ RUINS

VIOLA DAVIS messages ROCK ADAM and threatens him from very far away.

ROCK ADAM

Ha! I'm an indestructible, super-strong, super-fast, flying superhero. DC need me to lead their film universe.

SUPERCARVILL

Hi, everyone! I'm back. Sooo... this is awkward.

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER

NEXT ISSUE
ON SALE 2 FEB



SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND
ENJOY GREAT SAVINGS!
See page 42 for details



SAVE
59%

WARNER

STAR WARS

THE MANDALORIAN

THE GALAXY'S CUTEST ASSET...

When the Mandalorian was tasked with bringing in a highly sought-after 50 year-old asset, he certainly was not expecting Grogu. His surprise was shared by millions of viewers, who rallied around the adorable 'Baby Yoda' as Mando saved him and then he saved Mando again and again during their adventures. Now, Grogu can join your adventures in a unique glitter globe from The Bradford Exchange.

Sitting within his battered pram, Grogu is fully-sculptural and handpainted for authenticity. The pram is just as we remember it from the series a little worse for wear, resting atop a local rock. A crystal clear globe surrounding The Child is full of swirling glitter conveying the power of the Force in this must-have for every Star Wars™ fan!

- Grogu is masterfully sculpted, handpainted, and sits beneath his blanket within his pram
- The pram appears to have come to rest atop a nearby rock, which is also sculpted and handpainted
- A crystal-clear glass globe envelops Grogu, filled with sparkling glitter, as if the Force surrounds him

A LICENSED EDITION, ONLY AVAILABLE FROM THE BRADFORD EXCHANGE... ORDER NOW!

Order your STAR WARS™ The Mandalorian™ 'Grogu' Glitter Globe now at just £99.96, payable in 4 interest-free instalments of £24.99 (plus £9.99 S&S)*. Your purchase is backed by our unconditional, 365-day money-back guarantee and accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity. Pay nothing now – simply complete and return the Priority Order Form today.

© & TM Lucasfilm Ltd. © The Bradford Exchange. * S&S - Shipping & Service. Offer applies to UK only.
** - Subject to stock availability. Our guarantee is in addition to the rights provided to you by consumer protection regulations. 01-34564-001



Actual size measures approx. 5.5 inches (13.9 cm)
in height x 6.75 inches (17.1 cm) in width.

PAY NOTHING NOW

ORDER FORM

Please Respond Promptly

To: The Bradford Exchange, PO Box 653, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 4RA

YES! Please order ___ (Qty) of **THE MANDALORIAN™ GROGU GLITTER GLOBE** for me as described in this advertisement.
Complete today or Call 0333 003 0019

Name (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) _____
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address _____

Postcode _____ Telephone _____

Mobile _____

Email Address _____



Applicants must be aged 18 or over. Please note, we may contact you via mail, email and mobile with information about your reservation. For details of our privacy policy, please go to www.bradford.co.uk/privacypolicy or contact us at the above address or phone number.

01-34564-001

Order Ref:427617

FASTEST WAY TO ORDER

www.bradford.co.uk/groguglobe

or call our 24hr hotline on 0333 003 0019
and quote reference code 427617

ARROW

EXCLUSIVE

THE LUKAS MOODYSSON COLLECTION



on Blu-ray and
digital from
January 30



Streaming exclusively
from January 27 at
arrow-player.com



All seven films
available together
for the first time with
**brand new
2K restorations**